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Perception of Factors that Facilitate or Inhibit Associate Degree Completion at the
Community College Level: A Case Study

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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May 2017

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Keywords: Student Success, Associate Degree, Community Colleges, Factors, Degree
Completion

ABSTRACT

Perception of Factors that Facilitate or Inhibit Associate Degree Completion at the Community College Level: A Case Study

by

Cathryn Jean-Clair Hughes

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and faculty of one community college on the factors that facilitate or inhibit collegiate student success toward associate degree completion. Degree completion was defined as graduating with an associate degree. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What support systems or resources are in place at the community college to assist students with degree completion? (2) What factors in the college student success course at this community college facilitate or inhibit successful degree completion? The case study was conducted in a single community college in North Carolina. Participants included 10 community college professionals and 5 students. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and then transcribed. Pseudonyms were used to maintain participant anonymity. The data were analyzed through the process of coding. Findings identified eight themes in relation to facilitating and inhibiting degree completion at the community college level. These themes were: (a) curriculum, (b) advising, (c) support services, (d) relationships, (e) faculty status, (f) intrinsic motivation, (g) developmental courses, and (h) external factors. Conclusions of the research study and recommendations for further research were determined.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Randy and Carol Hughes, and my sister Carrie Hughes, as they have showed me the true meaning of being an educator and life-long learning. Without you all, I would not be where I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of my family, friends, classmates, and colleagues who have supported me all the way on my journey. I would also like to thank every educator that I have had throughout my entire educational career beginning from kindergarten to Graduate school. Without them, I would not be able to have achieved my dream as a professional.

A special thanks to my committee, Dr. Stephanie Tweed, Dr. William Flora, Dr. Cecil Blankenship, and most of all to my chair Dr. Pamela Scott for their encouragement and wisdom throughout this important chapter of my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges throughout the nation have grown to be of significant importance during the period of 2006 and 2016. Due to the economic recession that began in 2008, community colleges have reemphasized workforce development (Hultin, 2016). The importance of community colleges has also grown in part due to the strengthening of communities and the embracing of local cultures. Recently, the topic of community colleges made the news in the 2015 State of the Union Address with a presidential proposal to make community college education free to students who maintain specific requirements (Remarks, 2015). Some states, including North Carolina, are providing ways for high school students to take community college courses free of charge and earn college credit before they graduate (Rural, 2014). The North Carolina educational grant, Investing in Rural Innovative Schools (IRIS), has put more emphasis on rural high school students being able to obtain college credit during normal school hours while on the campus of their high school in the hopes of increasing student success at the collegiate level.

Community colleges have faced scrutiny when compared to other post-secondary educational institutions in terms of academic rigor, retention and degree completion. “The open access and affordability community colleges offer traditionally have appealed to student populations who have been characterized as low-income, first-generation, minority or working adults” (Hultin, 2016, p. 1). Policy makers have questioned institutional commitment as a factor that contributes to student success in terms of degree completion (Voight & Hundrieser, 2008). Voight and Hundreiser explained that,

“measures of the quality of an institution’s overall product, retention and graduation rates are of interest not only to accrediting agencies, policy makers, and the general public or taxpayers, but, especially to students, their families, and contributing alumni” (p. 2).

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and faculty of one community college on the factors that facilitate or inhibit collegiate student success toward associate degree completion. Attention was paid to community colleges, students, administrators, support services, and faculty. It was important to identify factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion to assist decision makers at the community college.

Research Questions

The following overarching research questions were used to examine the factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion at the community college level:

1. What support systems or resources are in place at the community college to assist students with degree completion?
2. What factors in the college student success course at this community college facilitate or inhibit successful degree completion?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and faculty of one community college on the factors that facilitate or inhibit collegiate student success toward associate degree completion. Degree completion was defined as graduating with an associate degree.

Significance of the Study

Student retention rates at the community college level are at lower levels compared to other post-secondary institutions (Kolodner, 2015). It is important to identify factors that facilitate a student's success as a community college student but to also investigate the barriers that may inhibit degree completion. This study contributes to the existing educational knowledge base focusing on factors facilitating and inhibiting student completion of an associate degree.

Scope of Study

This was a qualitative case study that focused on the perceptions of students, administrators, and the faculty of one community college on factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion. As noted by Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study should be considered by a researcher when:

- (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions;
- (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study;
- (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are

relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545)

Statement of Research Bias

As a researcher, it is important to note my role and experience within the community college setting. I have strong feelings about the importance of community colleges within local communities and identifying the factors linking student degree completion at the community college level. I was a community college graduate who obtained an Associate in Arts degree. I have been employed part-time by two community colleges, formerly as a human resource development instructor and currently as an online adjunct instructor.

Delimitations and Limitations

Student population was selected through snow ball sampling. The student population consisted of both full-time and part-time students attending the community college. All students had to be on track to complete an associate degree from the community college. This case study was conducted at a community college within a rural community setting.

Definition of Terms

Administrators: Individuals, excluding instructors, employed by the community college to support students in their path toward degree completion (College Administrator, n.d.).

Community College: Post-secondary institution where a student can obtain a certification or associate degree within two years. Student can also transfer credits obtained at the community college to a four-year institution (Community Colleges, 2016).

Degree Completion: Obtaining a collegiate associate degree at a two-year institution (community college) that can be utilized for employment in a career or transferred to obtain a four-year degree (College, n.d.).

Degree Seeking Students: Individuals working towards obtaining an associate degree. This study includes both full-time and part-time students (Definitions & Instructions, n.d., p. 4).

Full-Time Students: Enrolled for 12 or more credit hours of course work per semester (Definitions & Instructions, n.d., p. 6).

Part-Time Students: Enrolled for less than 12 credit hours of course work per semester (Definitions & Instructions, n.d., p. 8).

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 presents the need for this research study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature of factors contributing to community college student success in terms of degree completion. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedures used to collect data and the ethical protocol needed. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the data collected. Chapter 5 summarizes the study, presents conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Community colleges throughout the nation have grown to be of significant importance during the period of 2006 and 2016. Due to the economic recession that began in 2008, community colleges re-emphasized workforce development (Hultin, 2016). The importance of community colleges has also grown in part due to the strengthening of communities and the embracing of local cultures. Recently, the topic of community colleges made the news in the 2015 State of the Union Address with a presidential proposal to make community college education free to students who maintain specific requirements (Remarks, 2015). Some states, including North Carolina, are providing ways for high school students to take community college courses free of charge and earn college credit before they graduate (Rural, 2014). The North Carolina educational grant, Investing in Rural Innovative Schools (IRIS), has put more emphasis on rural high school students being able to obtain college credit during normal school hours while on the campus of their high school in the hopes of increasing student success at the collegiate level (Rural, 2014).

Academic Motivation, Engagement, and Efficacy

Ozmun (2013) examined whether high school students who are predisposed to enroll in dual enrollment courses have high levels of motivation in regards to college and academic self-efficacy. There were multiple purposes of the study. The study evaluated students' levels of college and academic self-efficacy before enrolling in dual-enrollment

courses. The researcher explored the relationship between academic success in terms of letter grades and high school students' perceptions of their own self-efficacy. The study was based on survey results of 114 juniors and seniors from eight high schools in Southeast Texas participating in a dual-credit program at Lamar State College-Orange.

The findings suggested that even though students claimed they were academically motivated, they did not display high levels of academic self-efficacy at the college level. "The results of the analysis demonstrated that despite reporting high overall grades, these high grades correlated only minimally to students' overall level of self-efficacy" (Ozmun, 2013, p. 69). The researcher suggested that college success may lie within dual-credit programs instead of self-efficacy being a factor among high school students. Based on the research study, the researcher suggested that many high schools specifically reach out to high performing students to enroll in dual credit courses. Ozmun was surprised to find that high grades and high academic motivation did not seem to lead to high college and academic self-efficacy. The researcher also stated that other factors including parents' education level, communities, or the college-going culture might contribute to this finding.

An (2015) examined whether academic motivation and engagement are connected to dual enrollment and academic performance. This study also examined the relationship of academic preparation in high school and academic performance in college including the role of dual enrollment. Data from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education was used. This was a longitudinal study of first-time college students who entered 1 out of 19 collegiate schools. The sample size from the data consisted of 3,779 respondents. The study was quantitative in nature.

The findings suggested that dual-enrollment tended to increase academic motivation regardless of college selectivity. The researcher indicated that students who enrolled at highly selective situations, regardless of their dual enrollment participation, may benefit from attendance at these institutions. The research findings implied that dual enrollment does directly influence academic performance after “accounting for academic motivation and engagement” (An, 2015, p. 121).

Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) studied the most common characteristics of community college students who graduate. Qualitative methods were used by conducting semi-structured interviews among faculty, staff and graduates from a large, public community college in the Southeastern United States. All of the students in the study graduated within three years of enrolling at the community college. The community college in the study was 30 miles from a large metropolitan area that serves a 12 county area.

Findings of the study revealed that students who graduated from the community college all had common characteristics: strong motivation and a drive to succeed, self-empowerment, clear goals, and the ability to manage external demands. It was found that “students with clear goals and high motivation are successful despite poor academic preparation. Without clear goals, student motivation could be diffused in different directions and course majors with little return” (et, all., 2014, p. 234). The researchers also found that “having clear goals enables faculty and administrators to steer successful students in the right direction with regard to basic writing and mathematics skills” (et, all., 2014, p. 234). One of the most important findings of the study was that “academic preparation may be a critical problem leading to low graduation rates, but our findings

indicate that underpreparedness can be overcome by a motivated, self-empowered student” (et, all., 2014, p. 238).

Academic Program

Nitecki (2011) examined two successful career-focused programs at an urban community college struggling with retention (one of the lowest in the state). The study examined the Paralegal Program and the Early Childhood Education Program. The research methodology used document analysis, faculty and student interviews, and classroom observations. In terms of the study, “*success* is defined as graduating with an associate’s degree” (Nitecki, 2011, p. 99). The study focused on the program, its culture, and how they maintained high retention rates within their program. The research was conducted at Fairview Community College, an urban community college that serves a major metropolitan area in the northeast of the United States. Both the faculty and staff are very diverse at the college campus.

Due to the size of the community college where the research was conducted, the program level, not the institutional level, is where students felt the most support. This support was felt through interactions with peers, and professors. The research findings suggested that the strength of both academic programs contributed to student retention. Both programs “conducted their own advisement and provided job readiness and internship experiences” (Nitecki, 2011, p. 39). The researcher stated that each program created its own positive program culture that “encouraged retention, graduation, transfer, and student success” (Nitecki, 2011, p. 39). Researchers of the study suggest that specific academic programs may be a factor in student success instead of the community college.

Hirschy, Bremer, and Castellano, (2011) explored the characteristics of students in subbaccalaureate occupational programs, specifically those that are career-related and that are in career and technical education (CTE occupational education) at the 2-year college. The researcher stated that students who are enrolled in certificate programs are often more similar to students who are pursuing occupational associate degrees compared to those enrolled in academic associate degree programs. The researchers noted that in another study, it was “found that more than two thirds of students in occupational majors at subbaccalaureate institutions left after having completed a year or less of coursework over a 5-year period” (et. al., 2011, p. 299-300).

Et. al, proposed a conceptual model composed of four constructs for student success in the CTE track: student characteristics, college environment, local community environment, and student success outcomes. It was suggested that by using a conceptual model at community colleges, would assist faculty members, administrators and policy makers in thinking about how specific practices can impact occupational students and how to allocate scarce resources in the best manner. The researchers suggested to use the conceptual model of student success for CTE students at the community college level to provide career integration, promote collection and tracking of student educational goals, and expand traditional student success measures to reflect the experiences of CTE students.

Athletics

Horton (2009) explored the relationship between community college success and athletic participation among students. Specifically, “What role do institutions and athletic

participation play in producing successful students at the community college?” (Horton, 2009, p. 17). The research embodied a phenomenological framework emphasizing “how individuals perceive their physical and social environment and the meaning they apply to their individual experiences” (Horton, 2009, p. 18). Interview transcript data was used to analyze the research. For this research study, “success” was defined as “finding personal happiness, passing all of their classes, maintaining athletic eligibility each semester, and having a good athletic season both individually and collectively” (Horton, 2009, p. 19).

Collection of data consisted of one-on-one interviews with current and former community college athletes from 2007 preseason and postseason football rankings and 2008 men’s preseason baseball rankings released by the NJCAA. This sample was used to have a nationwide sample of student athletes. “Combined, a total of twenty-eight institutions and sixteen states were represented in all three rankings” (Horton, 2009, p. 20). Three four-year institutions were also selected to gain voices of community college athletes after transferring to a four-year institution. The student athlete sample consisted of nine male students and eight female students. “Eight students were enrolled at the community college at the time of the study; the remaining students were attending a four-year institutions” (Horton, 2009, p. 20). All interviews were audio recorded, conducted by phone, and transcribed. The interviews were analyzed to identify emerging themes.

Findings identified multiple reasons why students chose to attend a community college instead of a four-year institution. Three themes emerged: the community college difference, academic commitment, and the institutions’ commitment to student athletes. Students identified multiple reasons for attending community college including “the ability to stay at home while attending college, less expensive tuition, a

higher level of comfort with a smaller institution, reservations about personal preparedness to be successful at a large college or university and the opportunity to continue their dream by participating in athletics” (Horton, 2009 p. 21).

The researcher suggested that “athletic programs at the community college are an extension of learning opportunities that cannot be measured by dollars and cents.” It was noted that in order to “successfully merge class and cleats” community colleges must have:

- Investment in athletic and academic support staff to ensure student athletes are on track to accomplish their goals, whether degree attainment, transfer, or professional development.
- Provision of available funds for resources for both students and student athletes, which include but are not limited to counseling (academic and personal), tutoring, and personal growth and development workshops.
- Encouragement of faculty to be actively involved in the athletic program and in the lives of student athletes as tutors, advocates, and faculty representatives to the athletic department (Horton, 2009, p. 25).

Barriers to Student Success

Wirth and Padilla (2008) examined student success at a community in south Texas. For the study, student success was defined as “progress toward graduation or actually graduating college” (p.688). The researcher indicated graduation as one of the

desired outcomes for college-going populations. The Padilla qualitative approach was used focusing on the experiences of students as individuals and also examines campus barriers that students must also overcome to be successful at the collegiate level, mainly at two-year institutions. The goal of the study was to define barriers of student success in community college and how students can overcome those barriers. The qualitative study used Padilla's qualitative student success modeling QSSM approach that analyzed two components: (a) a general student success model (GSSM) based on expert systems theory, and (b) a local student success model (LSSM) based on the general student success model.

Barriers were identified that hindered students from success in the community college setting. Wirth and Padilla discussed that the suggested implementation model should be used for student success at the community college level. On the basis of the model, student services providers meet individually with students who need help overcoming barriers at the academic level. By doing this, barriers can be determined that prevent student success and transfer them to someone who can help with the barrier. Once the student overcame these barriers, they are more likely to graduate instead of dropping out. This implementation model could also be used at other community colleges to help with student retention, improve graduation rates and student success.

Seago, Keane, Chen, Spetz, Joanne, and Grumbach (2012) investigated predictors of student success in the field of nursing. Four general constructs were used as predictors of student success: dispositional factors, career value factors, situational factors, and institutional factors. "The study design was correlation and descriptive in nature, with a

convenience sample of six intervention colleges and six matched-pair control colleges” (et. al, 2012, p. 489).

Researchers of the study found that “previous academic achievement, as measured by prenursing GPA and science GPA, was a positive predictor of any-time and on-time graduation” (et. al, 2012, p. 494). It was also found that the self-report dispositional variable of academic self-confidence “predicted higher any-time and on-time graduation rates” (p. 494). The researchers also noted that situational variables like employment, family, cost and social support were not significant predictors of graduation. “This indicates that school environment is a predictor of graduation success, but it was not necessarily seen at the intervention schools. Therefore, the activities that were funded in the study were either not effective or had an effect too small to be captured by the graduation rates” (et. al, p. 494).

David, Lee, Bruce, Coppedge, Dickens, Friske, and Thorman (2013) examined the relation between “community college students’ reports of barriers to success and measures of their actual success in college, specifically fall-fall persistence and overall grade point average (GPA)” (et. al, 2013, p. 5). A Principal Components Analyses was conducted on a survey that assessed barriers to student success. Five factors were revealed reflecting distinct barriers towards success at the community college level.

After a logistic regression was conducted “examining the relations between barriers and persistence it was found that lack of social support was the main predictor (negatively), when all other predictors were included in one analyses” (et. al, 2013, p. 5).

Findings indicated that Poor College Adjustment,

Developmental Placement, Financial and Transportation

Challenges, and Negative Experiences with College

Services were significantly linked with lower GPAs.

Problems with adjustment can negatively impact students' grades directly by leading to poor performance on exams and assignments (et. al, 2013, p. 11).

Poor College Adjustment was found to be “significantly and positively correlated with Lack of Social Support and Negative Experiences with College Services” (et al, 2013, p. 11).

Shriner (2014) examined the impact on student success in correlation to the policy of late registration at one community college in Florida. After reviewing multiple studies on the same topic, the researcher stated that “All three drew the same conclusions: students who registered late were not as successful as students who registered early” (Shriner, 2014, p. 587). Data was collected in a quantitative nature from a Florida community college to “determine the effects of late registration on student success and achievement during the fall semester” (Shriner, 2014, p. 589).

The findings “reflect that students who register on or after the first day of class are not as successful academically when compared to students who registered early” (Shriner, 2014, p. 588). However, the researcher noted that the study “relied on demographic and select variables” and did not “take into account the engagement of students inside and outside of the classroom” (Shriner, 2014 p. 589).

Community College Leadership

In 2011, a report titled “Eight important questions for eleven community college leaders” focused on community college leaders that was “created from in-depth interviews conducted via telephone and email by George Lorenzo, editor-in-chief of the SOURCE on Community College Issues” (Eight, 2011, p. 1). For the report, eleven community college leaders across the nation were interviewed and asked eight questions. Questions on: college readiness, remedial education, workforce development, educational technologies, student services, data analysis, funding/grants and the future were all asked.

Researchers asked if community college educators have a clear idea what it means to be college ready (Eight, 2011, p. 4). “The systems in place at many community colleges to identify whether or not an incoming student can realistically be considered ready for college are not exactly working very well” (Eight, 2011, p. 4). One of the interviewees, Lassiter, a Chancellor at Dallas County Community College stated that their community college is “exploring the development of new diagnostic tools that can identify academic and skill deficiencies at a more granular level in order to provide more modular, accelerated remedial education as opposed to full-semester remedial courses that typically frustrate students and cause them to drop out” (Eight, 2011, p. 4).

Researchers also asked what issues seemed to prevent employers and community colleges from collaborating effectively to support workforce development. “A general consensus among the interviewees was that community colleges have historically been, and continue to be, highly effective and sought out partners with small and big businesses for the development of employee training programs” (Eight, 2011, p. 7). However, it was noted that there were other barriers to overcome. One of the most important questions

was “What challenges are community colleges facing in regard to enhancing student services, and what kind of solutions are needed? (Eight, 2011, p. 10). Budget cuts were stated to have the biggest impact on student services and that community colleges “cannot get student services and academic affairs to work together due to a king of silo effect. Solutions to such challenges exist but have not yet been full implemented” (Eight, 2011, p. 10). It was also asked for interviewees to explain the most important issues that community colleges are facing today and for their future. It was noted that “keeping with technology, the prospect of numerous community college leadership retirements coming soon, issues and challenges related to the so-called “completion agenda,” and serious expectations of significant change on the near horizon” (Eight, 2011, p. 14).

Amey and Barnett (2006) analyzed community college leadership programs throughout the nation and if they meet the needs of 21st-century community colleges today. “To ensure that qualified candidates are available to fill upcoming vacancies as growing numbers of community college presidents and senior administrators retire, the American Association of Community Colleges and colleges nationwide are placing a special interest on community college leadership development programs” (Amey & Barnett, 2006, p. v). The researchers analyzed multiple strategies and practices of new community college leadership programs at the university level. Six university-based leadership programs were examined by reviewing materials from the AACC Leadership Summit on University Programs. Program literature reviews were also studied along with the site visits with faculty, administrators and students.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) identified five essential characteristics for today’s community college leaders: understanding and

implementing the community college mission, effective advocacy, administrative skills, community and economic development, and personal, interpersonal, and transformational skills (The college, n.d, p. 1). The AACC also identified characteristics “thought to be essential to effective leadership development programs of the 21st century” (The college, n.d, p. 1). Essential program characteristics for community college leaders include: accessibility, low cost, high quality, tailored to working professionals, provide mentoring opportunities, and allow for personal reflection and assessment. It was found newly created university-based leadership programs are meeting “the challenges outlined by the AACC in 2001” (The college, n.d, p. 23). All of the programs shared common themes; “each of the six programs had built into its structure features benchmarks that increase student success” (The college, n.d, p. 23).

- Cohorts
- Structured curricula
- Research support
- Adult learning instructional strategies
- Progress-to-degree checks
- External program reviewers
- Ongoing assessment
- Accessible course and program delivery through a broad
Range of options, including 15-week courses, weekend
and monthly offerings, and online/hybrid courses (The college, n.d,
p. 23).

The researchers noted that “these programs represent excellent efforts of innovative and dedicated advocates of community college leadership development” (The college, n.d, p. 23).

Competencies (2005), highlighted six competencies that are prudent for community college leadership. In the fall of 2004, the American Association of Community Colleges distributed a survey to participants in a leadership summit and to members of the Leading Forward National Advisory Panel. “Out of the 125 surveys, 95 were returned resulting in a response rate of 76 percent” (Competencies, 2005, p. 1). Also, 100 percent of the respondents stated that each of the six competencies were essential to the performance of a community college leader.

The six competencies found to be essential for effective community college leaders were: organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism. Organizational strategy was found to be very important for community college leaders. “An effective community college leader strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends” (Competencies, 2005, p. 3). Resource management was also found to be of great importance for effective leaders. “An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college” (Competencies, 2005, p. 3). Communication is of valuable importance when reflecting on leadership. “An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and

writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission” (Competencies, 2005, p. 4). An effective community college leader uses collaboration where one “develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promote the success of all students, and sustain the community college mission” (Competencies, 2005, p. 4). Advocacy at the community college level for the institution was found to be of great importance. “An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college” (Competencies, 2005, p. 5). Professionalism was also noted as important for community college leadership. An effective leader “works ethically to set high standards for self and others, continuously improve self and surroundings, demonstrate accountability to and for the institution, and ensure the long-term viability of the college and the community” (Competencies, 2005, p. 5).

Community Type

Hlinka, Mobelini, and Giltner, (2015) investigated factors “influencing the decision-making processes of traditional-age students living in rural, southeastern Kentucky” as they acquire their bachelor’s degree using “the community college as a steppingstone” (et, al., 2015, p. 1). The study was qualitative and examined students’ perspectives “of the factors that serve as barriers and as sources of encouragement, impacting decision making at critical steps of students’ academic pathways” (et, al.,

2015, p. 1). The researchers noted that the high rate of poverty in the region being studied is linked to lack of educational attainment.

The findings of the study suggest that there is a need “for one-on-one attention and support vs. a need for self-reliance, (b) the push of family encouragement vs. a pull of efforts of family responsibilities, and (c) a desire to stay in the region vs. a desire to leave” (et, al., 2015, p.1). These findings are important to note when investigating factors leading to student success in rural areas with similar economic traits at the community college level.

Hagedorn, Perrakis, and Maxwell, (2007) investigated “ten negative operative principles identified through focus group interviews conducted on 9 urban campuses with faculty, students, and administrators (et, al., 2007, p. 25). Qualitative data was used to “understand how the community college fulfils its multiple missions” (et, al., 2007, p. 25).

Ten negative community college commandments were identified in detail as to what community colleges should not do. The researchers also listed ten positive community college commandments. “Taken together, these lists of positive and negative ‘commandments’ formed the basis of ongoing research designed to illustrate the duality of institutional management” (et, al., 2007, p. 25-26).

Dual Enrollment

Johnson and Brophy (2006) examined student participation in dual enrollment programs. The purpose of the study was to examine the motivators of 162 rural high school students who chose to participate in a dual enrollment program. All participants in

the study were from two rural agricultural counties from Washington State attending a local college. The students were surveyed and a majority of the students were female 12th graders and the remainder were 11th grade students. Their parental family income was \$75,000 or less.

The findings did not show any differences between 11th and 12th graders choosing to participate in a dual enrollment program due to financial reasons. However, two factors were identified, social and academic, for participating in a dual enrollment program. The researcher stated that dual enrollment participants “place value on being in class with mature, productive people and being challenged by college-level coursework” (Johnson & Brophy, 2006, p. 9).

Giani (2014) examined the impact of dual-credit courses on postsecondary access, first-to-second year persistence, and eventual college attainment. The study was a quasi-experimental analysis using a statewide sample of students from Texas. The study utilized a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS), allowing an entire cohort of students to be tracked through their transition into postsecondary statewide. “Propensity score matching was used in order to reduce the self-selection bias associated with high achieving students being more likely to take dual-credit courses” (Giani, 2014, p. 200). The number of dual-credit courses students completed were studied and the subject of the courses taken. The effects of dual-credit were compared to alternative advanced courses.

The data was provided by the Texas Education Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Texas has a statewide, longitudinal, student-level database comprised of P-12 data. This allows for each student that is a part of the Texas educational system to be tracked by a specific number from prekindergarten through postsecondary facilities.

Postsecondary institutions for the study include community colleges, technical schools, public and private colleges. Students who began the 9th grade in public high schools were tracked through college. “After creating the matched sample using PSM we analyzed the influence of dual-credit coursework on three categories of postsecondary outcomes: access, first-to-second year persistence, and eventual completion of a course of study” (Giani, 2014, p. 206). Students were tracked for six years after they graduated from high school, beginning in the 2004-05 school year until the 2009-2010 school year.

The findings indicated that dual-credit participation increases for students in “the likelihood of accessing, persisting in, and completing both postsecondary generally and university courses” (Giana, 2014, p. 209). The researcher noted the findings suggest that there is a greater benefit of taking dual enrolment courses compared to advanced courses. Students who take dual-enrollment courses in a core academic subject significantly increase the chances that students would enroll in a college or university. “Dual-credit math courses were particularly influential in promoting baccalaureate attainment” (Giana, 2014, p. 215).

Harnish and Lynch (2005) examined the characteristics and operations of dual enrolment programs and their link to transitioning to postsecondary institutions. The study was qualitative and the first in a longitudinal study of dual enrollment students in Georgia. Harnish and Lynch (2005) found the following:

The first phase of the study, which is reported in this article, involved exploratory case study research to better understand the organization, operation, and outcomes of dual enrollment; determine factors that

facilitated or impeded the access of high school students to postsecondary education; and gain insight into the factors that encouraged students to continue their postsecondary studies (p. 172, 173).

For the study, three sites were selected for case studies. They were selected through a non-random, purposive sample that allowed investigators to study different settings and organizations in regards to dual enrollment. The sites in the case study were three technical colleges and their satellite campus or center, along with two high schools that were participating with the community college in terms of dual enrollment. “All three sites were among the top five most active technical colleges in terms of numbers of students enrolled in dual enrollment courses in 2002-2003. The sites also represented different models of delivery of dual enrollment and varying curriculum and program areas for dual enrollment courses with high schools. In the study, interviews were conducted among administrators at the high schools and colleges, high school counselors, and teachers of dual enrollment courses.

Harnish and Lynch, 2005 identified multiple themes and findings as a result of the study: organization and administration of dual enrollment (administrative structure, location of dual enrollment classes, staffing, funding, program development, credit policies), participation in dual enrollment (characteristics of students who participated, motivation, programs of study, impact of admissions requirements), and outcomes of dual enrollment (follow-up of graduates, benefits to students, and program success). Several factors of student participation in dual enrollment programs were identified at the

selected sites. It was noted that students felt that they benefited from dual enrollment due to their exposure to college, increased options, and dual enrollment helped them.

Radunzel, Noble, and Wheeler (2014) analyzed “the short-and long-term college outcomes of incoming students who had and had not taken dual-credit/dual enrollment courses in high school” (p. 1). For the study sample, data derived from four member institutions of the Texas-ACT college Success Research Consortium. “Some of the concerns associated with dual-credit programs pertain to the level of rigor and quality of instruction of the courses for preparing students for courses taught at the high school by high school teachers and courses at two-year postsecondary institutions” (et, al., 2014, p. 2).

Based on the study, the researchers state that students entering college with dual credit are generally, more likely to be successful in college completing their degree within a timely manner. Students are more likely to earn a grade of a B or higher in collegiate courses. Students “entering college with a greater number of dual-credit hours are more likely to progress toward a degree in a timely manner, and they do so without accumulating a substantially greater number of credit hours by graduation” (et, al., 2014, p. 1). Lastly, college success does “not differ between those who make most of their dual-credit coursework through a two-year institution and those who take most through a four-year institution” (et, al., 2014, p. 1).

Mathews (2013) investigated the reasons why North Carolina should expand access to dual enrollment courses for students so that more students will graduate with a college degree. “One of the most complex dichotomies in education is the struggle to ensure that more low-income minority, and first-generation college students pursue

higher education even while the cost of attendance at these institutions continues to rise” (Mathews, 2013, p. 1). Research has suggested that “participation in dual enrollment programs can increase the number of underachieving and underrepresented students who complete high school and enroll in college” (Mathews, 2013, p. 2).

Mathews stated that the state of North Carolina should “broaden the eligibility requirements of these programs and work with high schools and colleges to ensure that students from nontraditional backgrounds are not excluded from dual enrollment” (Mathews, 2013, p. 2). The GPA requirements for dual enrollment courses eliminates many students and that “students should be allowed to supplant the GPA requirement with a teacher recommendation and community colleges should be allowed to develop course-specific prerequisites” (Mathews, 2013, p. 2).

Struhl and Vargas (2012) examined the implications of high school students taking a dual enrollment course and the chances of it increasing their chances of attending college and graduating. The study sample consisted of 32,908 Texas students from the 2004 graduating class who completed college courses in high school. Half of the study group completed at least one college course before graduating high school. The propensity score matching model was used to account for student background along with “rigorous quasi-experimental methods to control for factors other than dual enrollment that could explain student success” (Struhl & Vargas, 2012, p. 1).

“Those who completed college courses through dual enrollment were significantly more likely to attend college, persist in college, and complete an Associate’s degree or higher within six years” (Struhul & Vargas, 2012, p. 1). “These findings held for all racial groups as well as students from low-income families” (p. V). Dual

enrollment students from low-income families “were particularly more likely to attend a four-year college in Texas after high school” (Struhl & Vargas, 2012, p. V).

In effective practices (n.d), the Blackboard Institute spotlighted North Carolina’s dual enrollment program. The report highlighted the online dual enrollment environment in the state, key factors that fostered the success, and breaks down critical roles (p. 2).

“North Carolina has been identified as one of eight cutting-edge states that are designing and implementing statewide dual enrollment policies” (Effective, n.d., p. 2)

In 2004, North Carolina began the Learn and Earn program and collaborated with the NC General Assembly, the community college system, local school districts, and the State Board of Education. The goal of the program “was to increase the number of high school graduates in North Carolina and better prepare them for the demands of the 21st century global economy” (Effective, n.d., p. 2). To provide dual enrollment opportunities to rural school districts, the state “started Learn and Earn Online (LEO) in 2008 as part of the broader Learn and Earn initiative” (Effective, n.d., p. 3). The program “brings dual credit opportunities to students across the state and transcends traditional limitations of geography and demography” (Effective, n.d., p. 3). The program creates the opportunity for “public high school students to earn free online college credit and allows qualified non-public high school students to do the same for only the cost of textbooks and supplies” (Effective, n.d., p. 3). All of the 115 schools districts within the state “are the primary feeders to LEO” (Effective, n.d., p. 4).

There are two providers of the LEO college courses: the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). “55 of the 58 community college participated in LEO between Fall

2005 and Spring 2007-enrolling a total of 2,2000 students in LEO over that period” (Effective, n.d., p. 5). iSchool is the UNCG virtual solution program that brings “online college classes to high school juniors and seniors and has approximately 5,8000 enrolled high schools students” (Effective, n.d., p. 7). iSchool students take their courses in a lab setting at their high school along with a facilitator.

The authors of the report state that “delivering dual enrollment classes online is an underexplored and low-cost way to do just that” (Effective, n.d., p. 10). By increasing the participation of students in an “online dual enrollment program is not only required for continued state funding, but a key to any program’s overall success” (Effective, n.d., p. 11).

Early Family Configuration

Boswell and Passmore (2013) examined the factors that influence student success in two-year colleges, community colleges or junior colleges. The purpose of the study was to review the “relationships between student success and biological children, marriage/cohabitation, early family configuration and hours work” (Boswell & Passmore, 2013, p. 9). For study, early family configuration refers to the relationship of parent figures/guardians in the household when the respondent was at age 12. The population of the study consisted of 9,000 youth, ages 12-17 as of December 31, 1996. They were interviewed each year beginning in 1997. Data from round 11 and round 12 questionnaires of 2007 and 2008 were examined in the study. The sample for the study included 602 and 487 respondents who reported being enrolled two-year colleges during 2007 and 2008. “This study applies a logistic regression analysis for years 2007 and

2008; the model is specified in a way that the independent variables are biological children, marriage/cohabitation, early family configuration, and work hours. The dependent variable is student success” (Boswell & Passmore, 2013,p. 13).

It was found that the independent variables were not related to student success. “These are surprising results because previous research has found that having dependents and working full-time are factors negatively associated with persistence and attainment for postsecondary students and that the highest proportions of students with these factors were attending two-year institutions” (Boswell & Passmore, 2013,p. 13). Boswell and Passmore (Boswell & Passmore, 2013,2013) stated that based on these findings, factors related to student success are more complicated than having children, being married or cohabitating, hours worked and early family configuration at the age of 12. They stated that the relationship between family background and two-year completion requires further research.

Early Predictors of College Success

Hein, Smerdon, and Sambolt, (2013) examined literature and provided a research brief of information for state, school and district personnel “seeking support to determine whether their students are on a path to postsecondary success” (p. 1). Early Childhood through early postsecondary education research was summarized to identify student skills, behaviors, and other characteristics that predict future academic and workplace success. “Our goal was to identify factors at all levels of education that predict future academic attainment and economic security. Not surprisingly, we found very few studies that link early childhood, elementary, or middle school characteristics with postsecondary

success” (et, al., 2013, p. 1). Over 80 research studies were reviewed for the brief and the information was sorted into three types of measures: indicator, predictor, and other potential factors.

The researchers identified that at the early childhood level, the early predictors of postsecondary success include persistence, emotion regulation, and attentiveness. Also, the following predictors were identified as contributors to children’s readiness for school: social-emotional development, approaches to learning, physical health, language, and cognitive development. At the early childhood level, “participation in school-readiness screenings and preschool programming has been significantly related to future school success” (et, al., 2013, p. 3). Other potential factors relating to school readiness were working memory skills; the display of positive play interactions with other students, family members, and teachers; and the ability to remain engaged in a task until the task is complete. It was also noted that “Research on these factors has found these skills are related to spelling and writing scores through age 7, and students who exhibit these skills and behaviors are more likely to be successful in the core subject area of reading and mathematics from kindergarten to fifth grade” (et, al., 2013, p. 3).

At the elementary level, Hein, Smerdon, and Sambolt, (2013) found that “achieving literacy by the third grade is correlated with reading and English language arts (ELA) proficiency on state assessments at the middle grades level” (et, al., 2013, p. 4). Also, students under grade 3 that are absent few than 10 percent of the time “are more likely to be promoted to the next grade and to receive higher grades in cores subject areas” (et, al., 2013, p. 4). It was also found that “certain social skills and behavioral predictors are correlated with future academic achievement” (et, al., 2013, p. 4). Lastly,

the “other potential factor at the elementary level is the demonstration of social competence. Social competence is the ability to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships with others” (et, al., 2013, p. 4).

At the middle grades level, multiple indicators of secondary success were identified. For example, “attendance rates have a relationship with on-time high school graduation” (et, al., 2013, p. 5). Passing core classes and exams at this specific age level are crucial to postsecondary success. “In the fifth and sixth grades, passing all ELA and mathematics courses is correlated with meeting benchmarks on assessments in future grades” (et, al., 2013, p. 5). In eighth grade, “indicators specify course-taking pathways and benchmark scores on national assessments that relate to future success, such as passing Algebra I and scoring at or above 292 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in mathematics” (et, al., 2013, p. 5). The literature suggests that critical thinking and decision-making skills have a relationship with secondary-level academic achievement. At the middle grades level, emotional expression, direct problem-solving, support-seeking behaviors and cognitive decision-making skills were found to be connected with future achievement.

Multiple indicators in correlation to postsecondary success were identified at the high school level. “The most frequently noted indicators at this level are attendance, GPA, and test scores. Missing no more than 10 percent of school days per grade level is primarily associated with on-track high school graduation” (et, al., 2013, p. 6). It was also found that “participation in college preparatory activities, such as summer transition and orientation programs, as well as high school-to-college bridge programs” are indicators of success (et, al., 2013,p. 6). Another predictor is transfer rates, “low-

mobility or school transfer rates between grades have been widely studied and identified as predictors of academic success. One study found that even one school transfer between Grades 8 and 12 is correlated with a dropout rate that is twice as high as observed for students who do not transfer” (et, al., 2013, p. 7). Lastly, emergent research suggests that students “who possess five core SEL skill sets (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) exhibit higher academic performance in college and better manage the anxiety and workload that college courses” compared to students who do not (et, al., 2013, p. 7).

At the collegiate level, postsecondary success was linked to “high GPA, adequate credit load, and passing general education courses without the need for remediation with the first two years of college” (et, al., 2013, p. 10). Students who earn 30 credits within their first year have a relationship with on-time degree completion (p.10). “Similarly, college students enrolled in four-year institutions who take remedial courses are more likely to drop out of college or transfer to a two-year institution” (et, al., 2013, p. 10). It was also noted that students who are involved in extracurricular activities “and membership in on-campus student organizations predict success in the form of sustained positive academic, psychological and civic engagement” (et, al., 2013, p. 10). “The predictors of postsecondary success include participation in college and career orientation and baccalaureate transfer programs and maintaining a combination of full0-time enrollment and part-time employment status” (et, al., 2013, p. 10).

Factors that Influence Student Success

Chen (n.d.), along with the *Community College Review* identified multiple factors that influence student success. Multiple themes and specific factors were found to contribute to student retention and degree completion. David and Fike, authors of the study, found that the average student attrition rate at the community college level is 41 percent from the first to the second year of school. Fike analyzed predictors of student return and graduation from fall to spring and fall to fall. “Progress of 9, 200 first-year community college students enrolled in a four year program at a community college” (Chen, n.d., p. 2). The study revealed multiple indicators that influenced student success.

The findings of the study revealed the following factors influenced a student’s likelihood of return:

- Students’ ability to pass developmental courses
- Students’ participation in internet/online courses
- Students’ participation in a Student Services Program
- Students’ ability to receive financial aid
- Parents’ educational levels of the student
- Students’ number of course hours per semester
- The number of hours dropped in the first fall semester

(Chen, n.d., p. 2).

The research study also revealed a correlation between completion of a development reading course, “successful completion of a developmental mathematics course, receiving financial aid, taking an Internet course, semester hours enrolled in the first semester, and participation in student support services” (Chen, n.d., p. 3). The data also revealed that

students who were enrolled in online courses “were more likely to experience retention and program completion” (Chen, n.d., p. 3). Fike also suggested that it was easier for students who had complicated lives to participate in online college courses.

Horton (2015) identified twenty key risk factors (or behaviors) “that place students at risk of failure” (p. 87). The study identified background, individual, and environmental characteristics impact college persistence and student success along with high-risk behaviors such as: self-discipline, procrastination, irresponsibility, financial and/or time constraints and critical personal factors.

Perseverance is the “quality that allows someone to continue trying to do something even though it is difficult” (Horton, 2015, p. 87). Horton 2015, stated that the lack of self-discipline, procrastination, irresponsibility, fear of failure, and no sense of self-efficacy are critical risk factors leading to lack of college persistence. Academic mindset was also found to be a contributing factor of college persistence. This includes financial constraints, lack of motivation, aimless, 1st generation college student and fixed mindset. Learning strategies was found to contribute to college persistence. This includes: teacher pleasers, unchallenged (bored), memorizes instead of actually thinking, doesn’t transfer/generalize knowledge, highly judgmental/negative self, and minimal metacognitive awareness. Lastly, it was found that social skills also are considered a critical at-risk behavior that impact college success. This includes students who are non-team players, insecure public speakers, lacks a support system, and also lacks mentors or role models. Horton noted that colleges “must utilize educational strategies that will assist students in achieving their performance goals” (Horton, 2015, p. 95).

Moffatt (2011) conducted a qualitative study that “explored the lives and experiences of 45 adult undergraduates, 26-60 years of age, and the factors identified as essential to their success and persistence in college” (p. 1). Interviews and follow-up activities discussed “why they *chose to add college* to their full-time lives, experiences in the classroom and interaction with campus services” (Moffatt, 2011, p. 1).

Four factors: support, personal motivation and determination, paying for college, and success in learning, were identified by participants as “crucial to accomplishing their goals” (Moffatt, 2011, p. 1). Data analyses results “indicated that: (a) these factors were the same regardless of age, sex, life commitments, or institutional setting; (b) the presence of risk characteristics did not hinder success; and (c) the desire for an improved quality of life was a compelling influence” (Moffatt, 2011, p. 1). The researcher also noted that “specific individual life and college systems and structures must be in place throughout (i.e. support), or at key times (i.e. specific campus services) during college for success and persistence to occur” (Moffatt, 2011, p. 1).

Ascend Learning (2012), identified multiple characteristics of students and college programs contributing to attrition. Personal characteristics included demographic attributes, precollege academic preparation and performance, student commitments, and student dispositions and skills. Program characteristics were identified as a contributor to attrition; “it is the characteristics of an institution or program such as its resources, faculties, structural/organizational arrangements, and its members, that can limit or facilitate the development and integration of individuals within the institution or program” (Ascend, 2012, p. 4). Student selection procedures into a program also impact attrition. “If admissions criteria are set at a minimum and a large number of students are

accepted that just meet the minimum requirements, chances are that attrition rates will increase” (Ascend, 2012, p. 5).

There were multiple “strategies, policies and processes that educators and programs can implement to ameliorate student attrition” at the collegiate level (p. 6).

- Take steps to ensure that course scheduling and pacing meets the needs of the student body, to the most practical degree possible.
- Provide students with high-quality resources to support learning.
- Provide students with high-quality, interactive instruction.
- Provide professional development that encourages instructors to establish positive relationships with their students.
- Provide opportunities for students to socialize and connect with other students.
- Provide financial support and other services such as daycare when possible.
- Establish admissions criteria that best meet the standards for the desired student population.
- Prior to enrollment, provide students with sufficient and *realistic* information regarding the program and the profession so that expectations are not inconsistent with reality (Ascend, 2012, p. 6-7).

Free Community College Movement- America's College Promise

Hultin and Weeden (2015) highlight President Obama's proposal to provide "tuition-free community college across the country that resembles a program created by the Tennessee General Assembly last year" (p. 1). Under the President's proposal, "American's College Promise," federal funding to cover three-quarters of the average community college tuition would increase, and states would have to cover the rest.

If all 50 states chose to participate in "America's College Promise," the President's administration "estimates the plan would benefit 9 million students a year and save each an average of \$3,8000 in tuition" (Hultin & Weeden, 2015, p. 1). However, the proposal depends on Congressional approval for the proposal to be enacted.

In 2015, a progress report on America's College Promise was published by the Executive Office of the President (\$60 billion over ten years). In the report, multiple states were highlighted across the nation that are making community college free. "In just the last six months, five states and communities have created new programs to provide free community college, including statewide programs in Oregon, and Minnesota and local efforts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Dayton, Ohio, and Palatine, Illinois" (America's, 2015, p. 1). Eleven other states have proposed legislation on the issue of free tuition at the community college level.

The report also discussed that by 2020, "an estimated 35 percent of job openings will require at least a bachelor's degree and another 30 percent will require at least some college or an associate's degree" (America's, 2015, p. 2). The report also stated that "According to one recent study, community college graduates make an average of \$10,000 more a year than those with just a high school diploma" (America's, 2015, p.

10). For students who continue school and obtain a four-year program “earn an average of \$27,000 more annually than those with only a high school degree” (America’s, 2015,p. 10). The report stated that over 40 percent of community college students are minorities and 57 percent are women. More than of the students are over 21 and that the majority of community college students attend part-time, working to “support themselves, their families, and to pay for school” (Americans, 2015, p. 12).

Free Community College Movement-Tennessee Promise

The South (2014) highlighted the Tennessee Promise proposal. “The proposal is a part of the governor’s “Drive to 55” initiative” (p. 7). The goal of the Tennessee Promise is to increase the number of the states’ residents with a college degree from 32% to 55% by 2025. The state is encouraging students to attend community college first by reducing “the current \$4,000 lottery scholarship for four-year colleges to \$3,000 for first and second-year students, and raise the scholarship to \$5,000 for third-and fourth-year students” (South, 2014, p. 7).

However, the funding for the proposed initiative is estimated to cost \$34 million annually. It would “be in the form of an endowment comprised of lottery reserve funds. The state now has about \$400 million in reserves” (South, 2014, p. 7). Other states are focusing on Tennessee’s initiative as an example to follow for their citizen to increase postsecondary degree attainment. The Tennessee Promise initiative has also received federal attention under the Obama administration to implement a future federal program similar to the Tennessee Promise.

Floyd (2015) highlights concerns of four-year universalities over the new Tennessee Promise initiative. The main concern is that “some officials were concerned that community colleges would draw prospective students away from four-year universities when the program went into effect earlier this year” (Floyd, 2015, p. 1).

Floyd discusses that ETSU-East Tennessee State University “is experiencing a slight decrease in the number of enrolled students, the university might start receiving more transfer students from two-year institutions, such as Northeast State Community College and Walters State Community College” (Floyd, 2015, p. 2). The Northeast State Community College President stated that “it’s likely that after two years, ETSU will seen an increase in the number of students transferring from Northeast State to the university” (Floyd, 2015, p. 2).

Due to the Tennessee Promise initiative, Northeast state “experienced an almost 100 percent increase in the number of enrolled freshmen...going from 650 freshmen in 2014 to 1,200 freshmen in 2015” (Floyd, 2015, p. 2). One of the requirements of the Tennessee Promise is community service. Eight hours are required every semester. “About 58,000 students applied for the program statewide, but only 22,500 satisfied the community service requirement” (Floyd, 2015, p. 2).

Samuels (2015) questioned the overall impact of the Tennessee Promise program and if it would produce community college graduates. “The Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship, which means it covers tuition after a student has applied for and received any federal and state grants that might also pay for tuition” (Samuels, 2015, p. 2). Samuels 2015, highlights the other hidden costs of attending college outside of tuition. “More than one-third of students with Pell Grants, who can get up to \$5,775 for fees,

books, and living expenses, still have between \$5,000 and \$10,000 in expenses”

(Semuels, 2015, p. 3).

Many have stated that programs like the Tennessee Promise “actually help low-income students the least, because they pay for college for everyone, regardless of their income, rather than spending that money to help low-income students who might have already received tuition scholarships but still need help with living expenses” (Semuels, 2015, p. 4). To encourage graduation and “To Maximize the impact of its investment, the Tennessee Promise includes mentorship components that backers say will help low-income students get to college and stay there” (Semuels, 2015, p. 4). Once students begin attending college, they are paired with a volunteer mentor who checks with them weekly to provide counseling. Due to the new program, “Tennessee community colleges are now trying to work more closely with students to make sure they’re ready for school” (Semuels, 2015, p. 7). One community college, Volunteer State, “is beginning to realize that counseling and advising for students is going to have to be more aggressive and intrusive than ever before” (Semuels, 2015, p. 7). This has led to community colleges within the nation to use multiple methods of positive reinforcement as they are “experimenting with other ways to help students complete college, including paying students who see mentors or who achieve certain completion goals, and establishing clearer pathways through different degrees and course sequences” (Semuels, 2015, p. 8).

The Tennessee Promise (2015), provides a short overview of the program including eligibility. For students to be eligible for the scholarship, students must follow the deadlines and requirements:

- Apply to the program by November 2, 2015.
- Apply to and enroll in an eligible institution.
- Complete FAFSA verification, if required by the student's institution, by August 1, 2016.
- Complete 8 hours of community service for each semester they receive the funding completed before each term.
- Attend two mandatory meetings led by the local partnering organization. Failure to attend the mandatory meeting will Result in loss of the Tennessee Promise.
- File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by February 15, 2016 (Tennessee Promise, 2015, p. 3-4).

One of the most important aspects of the Tennessee Promise program is the “individual guidance each participant will receive from a mentor who will assist the student as he or she navigates the college admissions process. This is accomplished primarily via mandatory meetings that students must attend in order to remain eligible for the program” (Tennessee Promise, 2015, p. 1).

The Tennessee Promise (2015) frequently asked questions provides information on how the program is funded, student requirements and mentor and community involvement information. “Students can use the Tennessee Promise at any of Tennessee’s 27 colleges of applied technology (TCAT’s), 13 community colleges or any in-state independent or four-year public university offering an associate’s degree” (Tennessee Promise, 2015, p. 1). According to the program, “Students who earn an associate’s degree and transfer to a four-year university will save up to 50 percent in tuition and fees”

(Tennessee Promise, 2015, p. 1). Looking at annual cost of the Tennessee Promise, it “is \$34 million to provide students with five consecutive semesters. The fifth semester addresses the nearly 70 percent of Tennessee high school graduates enrolling in community college who require at least one remedial class” (Tennessee Promise, 2015, p. 2).

The Tennessee Promise school resource guide (2015) provides in-depth information on the program. Eligible community colleges, four-year universities, and private institutions with eligible two-year programs are listed where the program will qualify. The service requirements are discussed in more detail. “Any service performed by a student which benefits the community may be counted, except:

- Work resulting in payment or remuneration of any kind.
- Work directly benefiting family members.
- Community service performed prior to January 1 of a Student’s senior year (Tennessee Promise, 2015, p. 23).

Gender and Race

Ganzert (2012) examined dual enrollment and the Huskins Bill in North Carolina; specifically focusing on the effects on academic success and graduation rates by gender and race. “The study is designed to investigate if there is a casual link between each program and to assess the academic success of male and non-white students who took these courses and later enrolled in a NC Community College” (Ganzert, 2012, p. 2) The research study was based on data drawn from the North Carolina Community College

system database that contained information between 2002 and 2008 from all 58 community colleges in the state.

In terms of the study, the data consisted of a cohort of 15, 527 students who graduated from high school in the spring/summer of 2003 and enrolled in a NC Community College in the fall of 2003. The study focused on identifying any differences in first-year GPA of students in relation to graduation, race/gender, and students who took dual-enrollment courses (Huskins Bill courses). Two types of North Carolina dual enrollment programs were used in the study: traditional dual enrollment and the Huskins Bill courses where instruction takes place at a secondary facility.

The design of the research encompassed quantitative statistical measures including parametric and non-parametric means comparisons. An ANOVA t-test, and chi-square tests were used to analyze data from 15, 527 North Carolina community college students. The researcher found that dual enrollment and the Huskins Bill courses showed positive effects on GPA and graduation rates for non-white students, as well as positive effects in graduation rate for female students enrolled in community college programs.

Findings identified that females averaged statistically higher GPAs in the Huskins Bill courses and dual-enrollment courses. The difference in gain between male and female groups who took dual enrollment or Huskins Bill courses was not significant. The study and others indicated that dual enrollment and Huskins Bill courses benefit non-white student college readiness. This information will help in determining if student success depends on gender in North Carolina community colleges.

Jenson (2011) provided an “overview of current theories and research about college retention and student persistence in higher education with particular attention paid to minority students, including Hawaiian and other indigenous groups” (p. 1). The concept of dual socialization was analyzed. Under dual socialization, institutions share responsibility in cultural and social integration of students into college. The author stated the assumption that minority students are solely responsible in assimilating and incorporating themselves to the culture of the college excuses institutions from dealing with their own barriers to retention” (Jenson, 2011, p. 1).

Multiple research findings from the review of the literature emerged including “students should not be required to leave their identity at home while furthering their education” (Jenson, 2011, p. 2). Also, to encourage college retention among minority students, colleges should “recognize and honor the cultural capital of minority students” (Jenson, 2011, p. 2). Jenson noted that “programs and communities need to increase minority students’ awareness of the social and cultural knowledge necessary to enter into and finish college” (Jenson, 2011, p. 2). The research also found that “students who made cultural connections through social groups that reflect their culture of origin were more likely to persist in higher education” (Jenson, 2011, p. 2). Among minority students and especially Native American students, it was found that social support and family are important in regard to retention and a successful college experience. Jenson identified multiple factors influencing retention from the individual, institutional and social/external level. From the individual level, Jenson argues that academic performance along with attitudes and satisfaction was contributors. From the institutional level, academic

engagement was a factor influencing retention. Lastly, at the social and external level, social and family support was influential in regard to college retention.

Barbatis (2010) researched the perceptions of underprepared college students who were ethnically diverse that had participated in a first-year learning community. The students attended an urban, culturally diverse, commuter campus in the southeastern United States. “Perceptions of graduates and those who earned at least 30 college-level credit hours were compared to their learning community peers who did not persist and had dropped out of college” (Barbatis, 2010, p. 15). The study sample contained 22 students: 6 graduates, 12 persisters, and 4 dropouts.

The findings of the study indicated multiple factors that contributed to college persistence. These included personal attributes, support systems, and other characteristics. “Findings suggested the following ways to enhance the academic experience of underprepared college students: (a) include critical pedagogy, (b) integrate co curricular activities with the academic disciplines, and (c) increase student-faculty interaction” (Barbatis, 2010, p. 14).

Wood and Williams (2013) identified variables that predict first-year persistence among Black male students that are enrolled in community colleges. “Specifically, this study explored persistence variables in four domains: 1) background/defining variables, 2) academic variables, 3) social variables, and 4) environmental variables” (Wood & Williams, 2013, p. 1). The data for the study “derived from the Education Longitudinal Study from Black males in public two-year colleges” (Wood & Williams, 2013, p. 1). Hierarchical logistic regression analyses was used for the study.

The findings indicated multiple factors that correlate with college persistence; “participation in intramural sports, extracurricular activities, talking with faculty, study habits, hours worked per week, supporting others, and life stress were predictive of persistence” (Wood & Williams, 2013, p. 1). Findings indicated environmental variables “were substantially more predictive of persistence than variables in other domains” (Wood & Williams, 2013, p. 1). The researchers noted that “while environmental variables often originate outside of the institution, college professionals are still responsible to curb the effects of “pull” factors” (Wood & Williams, p. 22).

Institutional Characteristics

Smith, Street, and Olivarez (2002) researched late registration policy and practices that might improve student success. The purpose of the study was to determine the differences between students enrolling during the three phases of registration (early, regular, and late) in a two-year college. For the study, academic records, registration time and demographic information were collected from a random sample of students at a single community college in the fall of 1998. “The sample consisted of 86 new students (55 regular and 31 late registrants) and 165 returning students (55 from each phase of registration). Analysis of covariance and chi-square tests were used to analyze the data” (et, al., 2002, p. 261).

Researchers found that “For both new and returning students, late registrants were shown to be much less likely to persist to the spring semester than were early (returning students only) or regular registrants” (et, al., 2002, p. 261). 80% of regular new students and 35% of late registrants that were new students were retained to the next semester.

“For returning students, 80% of early, 64% of regular, and 42% of late registrants were retained. Differences in withdrawal rates were also significant for both new and returning students” (et, al., 2002, p. 261). The researchers also noted that “Returning students also differed in their semester grade point average (GPA) and their successful completion rate based on their time of registration” (et, al., 2002, p. 261). According to this case study, registration is a critical factor in relation to student success at the postsecondary level.

Aragon and Johnson (2008) investigated the learning characteristics of students who completed online courses compared to those who did not. Specifically, “the differences between demographic, enrollment, academic, and self-directed learning characteristics of completers and noncompleters in online courses at one community college” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 146). For the study, course completion was defined by a letter grade of A-D. Noncompletion was defined as F, Dr (drop), W (withdrawn), or I (incomplete) (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 147). “Demographic characteristics were defined as age, gender, ethnicity, and financial aid eligibility. Academic readiness characteristics were defined by reading, writing, and mathematics placement as measured by Compass and Asset test and grade point average” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 147). The study consisted of 305 students from a rural community college in the Midwest of the United States. “The appropriate variables were queried and subsequently downloaded into an Excel database. This database was imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for further analysis” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 148). Chi-square was used to determine whether there were significant differences between the student characteristics of completers and noncompleters in online courses. A *t* test “was

conducted to compare the means of completers and noncompleters in online courses” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 149).

Multiple findings were gleaned from the study. “No significant differences were found within the characteristics of age, ethnicity, or financial aid eligibility” in regards to persistence in the online classroom (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 152). However, the study found “a significant difference between the number of hours in which completers and noncompleters enrolled” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 152). Also, there was a significant difference depending on the number of online hours enrolled. It was also found that previous GPA, “as measured at entry at the beginning of the semester of data collection, to be significantly different for completers and noncompleters in online courses” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 153). There were two other implications that emerged from the research. “The results of this study do not indicate that level of academic readiness as measured at entry into the community college influences completion or noncompletion in online learning courses” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 153). Also, “No significant differences was found in self-directed learning readiness scores between completers and noncompleters in online course” (Aragon & Johnson, 2008, p. 153). Based on the findings of the research study, Aragon and Johnson 2008, identified the following elements that online learning environments need to contain. “(1) address individual differences, (2) motivate the student, (3) avoid information overload, (4) create a real-life context, (5) encourage social interaction, (6) provide hands-on activities, and (7) encourage student reflection” (p. 155).

Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, and Leinbach, (2008) desired to “determine which *institutional* characteristics are correlated with positive community college

outcomes for students who attend one or more colleges as measured by *individual* student probability of completing a certificate or degree or transferring to a baccalaureate institution” (et, al., 2008, p. 633). The sample for the research study contained 2,439 students “whose initial postsecondary education was in one of 686 community colleges. However, regressions with full information included only 2,196 students in 536 community colleges” (et, al., 2008, p. 637). The estimation strategy of the study “addressed two methodological challenges: unobserved institutional effects and multiple institution attendance” (et, al., 2008, p. 644).

Findings of the study indicate “consistent results across different specifications; namely, a negative relationship between relatively large institutional size, proportion of part-time faculty and minority students on the attainment of community college students” (et, al., 2008, p. 632). The study also indicated that “colleges with a larger share of minority students have lower graduation rates, a result that is consistent with research using institutional data at both community colleges and 4-year colleges” (et, al., 2008, p. 644). It was also noted that individual characteristics “are more strongly related to the completion probabilities than are institutional factors” (et, al., 2008, p. 644). The findings imply that well-prepared students with economic resources are more likely to survive and do well at many institutions. However, “students with many challenges, including personal and financial responsibilities, may have trouble even in strong colleges” (et, al., 2008, p. 644). Lastly, the researchers stated that their findings were “consistent with the notion that a more professional atmosphere and personalized services, such as having a greater proportion of full-time faculty rather than part-time and expanding academic

support services, seem to benefit the traditional-age student population in the NELS: 88 sample” (et, al., 2008, p. 644).

Wolff, Wood-Kustanowitz, and Ashkenazi, (2014) evaluated the differences in online and face to face (F2F) student performance at community colleges, “which attract different students than 4-year institutions and professional programs” (p. 166). The purpose of the study was to investigate 11 factors that have a significant influence on student performance. The factors were: age, gender, course load, caregiver status, mode of deliver, GPA, credits previously completed, employment, and math, reading, and writing proficiency. The researchers used multiple and logistic regression models and examined 11 predictors of performance in an environmental biology course taught both online and F2F at a community college in the Midwestern Untied States.

Two main predictors were identified as a result from the study. “Employment, math proficiency, and mode of delivery proved to be significant predictors of successful course completion” (et, al., 2014, p. 166). Notably, “Employment and math proficiency were also found to be significant predictors of final exam performance, but mode of delivery was insignificant an at alpha level of .05” (et, al., 2014, p. 166). Interestingly, when quiz results were used “mode of delivery was found to be a significant predictor of final exam performance” (p. 166).

Rogers (2015) investigated the relationship of whether part-time faculty employment has a “direct influence on student success” (p 673). Rogers examined the employment status of faculty on student success of those enrolled in four, two-course sequences. For the purpose of the study, “student success is operationally defined as the student passing the second of a two-course sequence with a letter grade of “C” or better”

(Rogers, 2015, p. 675). The study sample included four cohorts from Maricopa county Community College District's Student Information System database. Pearson chi-square and binary logistic regression analyses were used to conduct the study.

Results of the study imply that "community colleges should not assume that hiring more full-time faculty will improve student success, and instead, should possibly consider utilizing funds otherwise allocated to hiring new full-time faculty on the development and compensation of part-time faculty" (Rogers, 2015, p. 673). Rogers stated that "Their employment status does not appear to hinder the success of student they teach as compared to their full-time counterparts, and it allows institutions to teach a far greater number of students than would be possible if more resources were allocated to simply increasing the number of full-time faculty" (Rogers, 2015, p. 683).

Jenkins (2007) examined institutional effectiveness at the community college level. "Using transcript-level data on over 150,000 Florida community college students, we estimated the effect on the graduation, transfer, and persistence rates of minority students at each of the 28 Florida community colleges as a proxy for institutional effectiveness" (p. 945). For the study, the colleges were ranked based on the estimated effects. Six colleges were selected for field research; three that had a high impact on minority student success and three that had a low impact. The field worked of the researchers "focused on a set of 7 elements of institutional policy, practice, and culture that we hypothesized are important for promoting student success" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 945). The seven elements hypothesized that community colleges should contain to be effective were:

1. Have an institutional focus on student retention and outcomes, not just on enrollment.
2. Offer targeted support for underperforming students.
3. Have well-designed, well-aligned, and proactive student support services.
4. Provide support for faculty development focused on improving teaching.
5. Experiment with ways to improve the effectiveness of instruction and support services.
6. Use institutional research to track student outcomes and improve program impact.
7. Manage the institution in ways that promote systemic improvement in student success (Jenkins, 2007, p. 949-950).

The researchers found that high-impact colleges “were more likely than low-impact colleges to coordinate their programs and services to support student success” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 945). Another significant finding was that “minority students were generally more successful in colleges that had support services targeted specifically to their needs” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 945). Most notably for community colleges was that the researchers stated “the key to a college’s effectiveness is not whether it adopts particular policies or practices, but how well it aligns and manages all of its programs and services to support student success” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 959).

Gnage and Drumm (2010) discuss the best hiring practices for community colleges from the perspective of college presidents. Gnage and Drumm discuss how the

ultimate goal of the hiring process at this level is to employ someone who will contribute and strive for student success at achieving their educational goals (p. 71). “For community colleges, the emphasis should always be on hiring faculty, staff, and administrators who are committed to student success in word and deed” (Gnage & Drumm, 2010, p. 72).

The authors stated that it is extremely important for a new hire to have “the ability to serve a diverse population” (Gnage & Drumm, 2010, p. 74). It also noted that “Attracting the right people requires ensuring that the job description is written so that prospective candidates will understand the requirements and so that those who will be working with the new colleague understand the relationship of that person’s position to their own” (Gnage & Drumm, 2010, p. 75). Once the right person is found for a position, mentoring is highly encouraged. “Supporting the new employee’s professional development is also critical, and probably at no other time is it more critical than shortly after hiring” (Gnage & Drumm, 2010, p. 79). The following is what is at stake in the hiring process:

- The quality of the academic environment
- The quality of learning
- Meaningfulness of services for students
- Students’ achievement of their education goals-
from retention to graduation (Gnage and Drumm,
2010, p. 79).

Voigt and Hundreiser (2008) highlight the focus areas that collegiate institutions must focus on to improve student retention. The researchers identified multiple themes

that “contribute to our understanding of the complex retention puzzle” (p. 8). Themes were academic boredom and uncertainty, transition/adjustment difficulties, limited or unrealistic expectations of college, academic underpreparedness, incompatibility, and irrelevance. The authors emphasize ten elements of successful retention initiatives for colleges to follow. Voigt and Hundreiser (2008) argue that colleges must assess the effectiveness of retention initiatives while also conducting a campus inventory. “It is important for institutions to identify their own sets of retention indicators/measures that correspond with their array of intervention programs as well as patterns of attrition” (p. 17).

Retention principles with specific target areas for retention planning were identified that colleges should pay attention to “stimulate retention planning and development retention action plans” (Voight & Hundreiser, 2008, p. 10). Some of the target areas listed included: recruiting, commuter students, course management, learning communities, service learning, counseling, first year experience course, engagement and satisfaction, recruit back, and adult learning strategies.

Instructors

Lukes (2014) examined dual enrollment programs and described the successful coordination and implementation of a dual enrollment geology program (consisting of two lectures and two lab courses). The lessons learned and challenges faced can provide insights to both high school and college instructors interested in organizing and implementing their own dual enrollment science program.

In the research article, instructions were provided on how to set up a dual enrollment course at a secondary institution. The high school and the nearest community college had to partner together to increase interest in the idea as well as to create an interest among students. In Table 1 on page 18, the author discussed the benefits of a dual enrollment program to students, parents, K-12 district administrators, college administrators and dual instructors.

The research discussed the considerations, planning and setup of a dual enrollment program. In particular, Lukes (2014) found the following:

In order to secure a commitment from the college, the future DE instructor has to have met the qualifications and applied to teach as an adjunct faculty member at the college. Oftentimes, community colleges require that instructors have 20 or more graduate-level credit hours in the subject being taught (p 19-20).

This has to be strictly followed for students to receive college credit. States will often have their own requirements on how much instructor experience is required in teaching college courses. A new curriculum must also be developed in the implementation process.

This research is beneficial to curriculum development and preparing other instructors in the new role. Successful implementation of collegiate courses including dual enrollment is a factor for student success.

Learning Communities

Romero (2012) examined the “relationship between student success and participation in a learning community” by using the Thriving Quotient instrument (p. 36). The study “utilized a multiple regression analysis to identify the extent to which participation in a learning community served as a predictor of thriving community college students” (Romer, 2012, p. 38). Students completed a survey that attended a community college in southern California. For the study, “A learning community is defined as a structured program in which ‘the same group of students take two or more classes together’ ” (Romero, 2012, p. 37). Student success was measured by “intellectual engagement, psychological well-being, and social we-being, in addition to grades and persistence toward graduation” (Romero, 2012, p. 38).

Romero found that students who participate in learning communities “are more engaged in their studies, pursue their goals with greater intensity, and express greater satisfaction with their lives” (2012, p. 41). The researcher also noted that a learning community “that serves students who require academic remediation is effective in assisting students to succeed academically in college and overcome the low academic performance that they displayed in high school” (Romero, 2012, p. 41). This supports the concept that learning communities and learning co-hort’s are instruments toward student success in regard to degree completion.

Measures of Student Success

Durkin and Kircher (2012), conducted a research brief identifying factors that affect community college completion rates. Data was used from 740 public two-year colleges in the United States with at least 2,000 students in the fall of 2007.

Key observations were noted within findings in addition to multiple appendices providing an over-view of the research. A variety of factors were noted that affect community college completion rates. Durkin and Kircher (2012), stated that age, students full-time status, faculty hiring practices, spending per student, support staff and urbanicity all contribute to student success in regard to degree completion at community colleges.

Mentoring

Crisp (2010) conducted a research study using structural equation modeling (SEM) to test a theoretical model of student persistence to identify a possible “relationship between mentoring and other constructs (i.e., social and academic integration, institutional and goal commitment) previously shown to contribute to students’ persistence behavior” (p. 41). The data consisted of a student population enrolled at a community college in the south-central United States in the fall of 2006. “The sample included a cluster random sample of 20 core courses offered by the humanities, mathematics, and science departments” (Crisp, 2010, p. 44). Crisp selected core courses because the students “desired to earn an associate’s degree and/or transfer to a four-year institution” (2010, p. 44). Students completed a 20-minute survey and 320

students granted permission for the researcher to obtain their academic records for the study.

Crisp found that women experienced significantly more psychological, degree, academic, and role model support in regard to mentorship. Majority and non-Asian minority students also reported receiving similar levels of mentoring support. The research suggested that “a lack of psychological, degree and career, academic, and role model support may not be a difference that contributes to the outcome discrepancies between majority and non-Asian minority community college students” (2010, p. 52). Crisp found that full-time students “were more likely to intend to persist and, in fact, were more likely to actually persist when compared to part-time students” (2010, p. 52). Mentoring was found to indirectly influence students’ intentions to “persist in college, as mediated through goal commitment” (Crisp, 2010, p. 52).

NC Community College System

Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, and Vigdor (2012) examined the success at the institutional level of North Carolina’s community colleges. Two dimensions were measured: attainment of an applied diploma or degree, or completion of the coursework required to transfer to a 4-year college or university. Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, and Vigdor (2012) wanted to discern if there were differences in community colleges across the state that make personal success more achievable for students at specific colleges and if there were variations among community colleges across the state. In regard to the study, the data came from only North Carolina community colleges.

Individual students were tracked over time from high school to community college through the public school system. The students were enrolled at a community college between the fall of 2001 and spring 2009. Information was based on 8th Grade End of Grade test scores in math in 1999 for students who enrolled in a community college between 2003 and 2004. Based on this information, students would have graduated high school in 2003. Also, student information was used from 2004, as well as if a student was retained. The sample consisted of 11,111 students. Quantitative statistical methods were used for the study.

The findings suggested that it was not possible to distinguish most of the system's colleges from one another along either dimensions. "Top-performing institutions, however, can be distinguished from the most poorly performing ones" (et, al., 2012, p. 805). The "adjusted rates of success showed little correlation either to the measurable aspects of the various colleges or the metrics used by the state" (et, al., 2012, p. 806).

Political Factors

Ayers (2011), conducted an analysis of 421 community college mission statements nationwide to "demonstrate how community colleges recontextualization a dominate discourse in which economic activity at the global scale transcends regulation, the nation-state lacks the moral authority to influence markets, and local communities have no choice but to adapt" (p. 303). The data for the study consisted of 421 community college mission statements retrieved from 2008 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) within 43 states. The findings imply that the "community college is a site of ideological struggle in which scalar relations-and the positioning of students and

communities therein-are both accommodated and contested” (Ayers, 2011, p. 311). Also, the findings suggest that the “community college has appropriated economic development as a mission priority and tacitly accommodated scalar relations typical of post-Fordism” (Ayers, 2011, p. 303).

Davis and Lewin (2015) explored some of the details of President Obama’s proposal that would provide free community college for students in the United States. The proposal “aims to transform publicly financed higher education in an effort to address growing income inequality” (p. 1). To qualify for the program, half-time and full-time students would be covered who maintain a 2.5 grade point average who are making progress towards degree completion. The plan is modeled after Tennessee’s free community college program.

The program would “apply to colleges that offered credit toward a four-year degree or occupational-training programs that award degrees in high-demand fields” (Davis and Lewin, 2015, p. 2). Under the plan, “the federal government would cover three-quarters of the average cost of community college for those students, and states that choose to participate would cover the remainder” (Davis and Lewin, 2015, p. 2).

Many are for the program, however many are against it the proposal as well. Some claim that this would put a financial strain on states that are already having budget constraints (p. 2). However, some legislatures have looked to lottery funds to help finance state programs similar to the proposed federal plan, including Tennessee. The proposal would pressure “states and community colleges to beef up their investments in high-quality education in ways that would have a lasting effect even before federal legislation was enacted” (Davis and Lewin, 2015, p. 3).

Psychosocial Factors

Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, and Wilcox (2013) examined the role of six psychosocial factors for predicting college success at a public Midwestern United States institution. The sample included 579 first-year college students during the 2008-2009 academic year using hierarchical regressions. Participants ranged from ages 18 to 23 years old and a majority of the participants were women. “Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the incremental effects of the CLEI scales for predicting college outcomes” (et, al., 2013, p. 256).

The findings revealed that psychosocial variables were relevant to the outcomes measures of success. “Academic self-efficacy and organization and attention to study were predictive of first-semester GPA when controlling relevant demographic factors” (et, al., p. 260). Psychosocial variables that were predictive of college students’ life satisfaction were: stress/time management, involvement in college activities, and emotional satisfaction with academics. The only factor that was not directly linked to GPA or life satisfaction was class communication. The researcher suggested four ways to intervene with students with low self-efficacy: (a) creating opportunities for successful performance, (b) finding role models, (c) experiencing encouragement and support, and (d) managing anxiety when performing in areas of low-self-efficacy.

Reform-Improving Community College Success

Rab-Goldrick (2010) reviewed literature on academic and policy research in regard to three levels of influence: the macro-level opportunity structure, institutional practices, and the social, economic, and academic attributes that students bring to college.

The purpose of the study was to “clarify the multiple sources of difficulties that community colleges face before deciding on solutions” (Rab-Goldrick, 2010, p. 438). The literature was filtered by two criteria: “ (1) Quantitative or qualitative methods that could rigorously address the research questions, and (2) quantitative studies needed to produce findings that could reasonably be generalized beyond the sample to the larger population of community college students” (p. 441).

Multiple themes emerged from the literature including: organizational structure (affecting federal and state funding mechanisms, financial aid processes, and institutional differentiation), institutional practices (pedagogical /organizational), and incentives to change student behavior (academic preparation/affordability), and online solutions. The researcher stated that more research needs to be conducted to investigate learning communities, adult literacy programs, and first-year support services.

Jenkins (2015) conducted research with The Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College and Columbia University focusing on issues impacting community colleges “with the goal of improving student success and institutional performance” (p. 933). The research was conducted “in close collaborations with community colleges, state higher education systems and national college success initiatives” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 933). Multiple themes emerged in regard to community colleges.

The researcher stated that “the primary ways that community colleges have sought to keep costs low in the past are unlikely to lead to better outcomes” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 934). This includes relying on part-time instructors and larger student to teacher ratio while also expanding online learning opportunities. Prior research shows that these

factors hinder learning even though they reduce costs for community colleges. Jenkins suggested that colleges will only be able to bring “substantial improvements in student outcomes by redesigning programs and support services in tandem and across the entire institution” instead of smaller targeted reforms expanded over time (Jenkins, 2015, p. 934). Lastly, Jenkins (2015), stated that investing in community college education “yields a high return for both students and taxpayers” and that colleges may need to “shift perspectives from a traditional cost-per-student model to a cost-per-completion model” (p. 935). It was suggested that promoting efficient transfer and alignment with labor market needs may be required to improve student success and progression.

Socio-Economic Status

An (2012) assessed the influence of dual enrollment on college degree attainment. The researcher conducted “a propensity score matching model with sensitivity analyses to examine the impact of dual enrollment on college degree attainment” (p. 58). The researcher investigated whether the impact of dual enrollment varies by SES. Lastly, the researcher assessed “the extent to which dual enrollment serves as a program that reduces SES gaps in college degree attainment” (An, 2012, p. 58).

The researcher used the National Education Longitudinal Study for the study to estimate the impact of dual enrollment on college degree attainment. The findings suggested that there were “significant benefits in boosting rates of college degree attainment for low-income students while holding weaker effects for peers from more affluent backgrounds” (p. 57). An (2012), found that dual enrollment had a positive

influence on college degree attainment after accounting for the students' family, schooling and achievements, and school context factors.

An (2013) conducted a research study to determine the influence of dual enrollment on academic performance and college readiness. A sensitivity analysis was conducted using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study and the 2009 Postsecondary Education Transcript Study to determine the impact of dual enrollment on academic performance and college readiness. The sample size was restricted to contain students under the age of 24 which left the sample size of 13,230 students for models that “estimate effects on first-year GPA and a sample of 140,090 for models that estimate effects on remediation” (An, 2013, p. 413). Four goals were measured for the study.

The findings suggested that dual enrollment positively influenced academic performance and college readiness. Dual enrollment students were less likely to participate in remediation compared to students who did not participate in dual enrollment. The researcher also found that dual enrollment did not hinder academic performance and college readiness for first-generation students. “These results suggest that dual enrollment serves as an effective means to raise academic preparation for a wider range of students than these programs originally intended” (An, 2013, p. 425). Little evidence was found by the researcher that expansion of dual enrollment participation would reduce parental-education gaps in first-year GPA and remediation. The researcher noted that “although first-generation students benefit from dual enrollment as much as non-first-generation students, parental-education gaps remain

because of baseline differences between first-generation and non first-generation students even among those participated in dual enrollment” (An, 2013, p. 425).

Mamiseishvili and Deggs (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to examine persistence outcomes over a 3-year period of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds across the nation at public 2-year institutions. The purpose of the study was to determine how in-college attributes, demographic characteristics, environmental factors, and personal goals of low-income students with the goal of obtaining a degree or transfer to another institution with the goal of degree completion. The sample of the study consisted of 1,350 low-income students.

The results of the study showed that 40% of students “did not realize their goals and left college without returning” (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013, p. 425). The findings also indicated that “low-income students generally take longer than 3 years to complete a degree” (p. 425). The study revealed that “being female increased the likelihood of both transfer and persistence for low-income students” and that delayed enrollment did not have “a significant influence on persistence, but it negatively affected the likelihood of transfer of low-income students” (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013, p. 425).

Greenblatt (2010) highlighted the community college system in the United States labeling them the “workhorses of the higher education system” (p. 2). “Two-year colleges educate 45 percent of the nation’s undergraduates. Forty percent of all public college graduates started at community colleges or have taken courses there” (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 2-3). Greenblatt stated that two-year institutions tend to “disproportionately” serve people who are poor, belong to ethnic and racial minorities, or who are working . Of the student population, sixty percent of community college students begin their college career

by taking remedial courses and that less than “a third of their students complete a two-year degree within three years” (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 3).

Strategies and Practices to Improve Retention and Success

Law (2014) explored the most important strategies to improve student retention and success. In the fall of 2012, the staff at St. Petersburg College (SPC) in Florida took part in an initiative for their college students called The College Experience: Student Success. The goal for the staff was to “Give our students the support they need to earn the degree or certificate that would change their lives” (p. 10). Law stated that their community college faced the following challenges:

- Far too few of our students were finishing their courses with a C or better.
- In our 10 most highly enrolled courses-the ones that are the gateway to an associate degree-about a third of our students consistently were unsuccessful.
- The news was even worse when we looked at how our minority students, particularly our African-American male students, were faring (Law, 2014, p. 10).

Based on the experience of the community colleges’ initiative and its findings, five key strategies were identified and suggested for other community colleges to follow.

The first strategy Law recommended was for community colleges to expand out-of-class support. “Our goal was to improve the course success rate without lowering academic standards” (Law, 2014, p. 11). To do this, their college added professional and

peer tutors, made their learning support centers more welcoming, spread the word that learning support isn't for those who are struggling, emphasized services were free, involved more faculty members to participate in tutoring and learning support, and increased access to 24/7 online tutoring resources. By focusing on these improvements, the college found that "The number of students visiting our learning centers more than doubled from fall 2012 to fall 2013" (Law, 2014, wp. 11). It was also found as a result of these activities, students visited the learning centers at least five times per semester. Students that visited the learning centers were much more likely to get at least a C or better in their courses.

The second strategy Law recommended was to integrate Career and Academic Advising. "We know that students are more successful if they have a distinct academic or career goal in mind. We concentrated on helping students identify career choices as early as possible so they could follow the proper academic paths to reach their goals" (Law, 2014, p. 11). The college identified students entering college for the first time who had a clear career goal, which ones were unsure, and which ones who did not have a goal at all. The college provided "intensive career exploration and advising efforts on the unsure and unclear" (Law, 2014, p. 11). After these strategies were provided, the college found that "About a third of first-time college students entered without a clear career goal. "It takes several advising sessions to help move most students to a definitive career path" (Law, 2014, p.11). It was also found that students who identified a career goal were more successful and returned for the next semester at a higher rate.

Law stated that the third strategy that SPC conducted was improving their new student orientation. "We were concerned that many of our first-time college students-

especially those who were not college ready in some academic areas-needed more information, resources, and tolls than they were getting in our online orientation” (Law, 2014, p. 11). The college eliminated the online orientation and replaced it with a face-to-face orientation for some students. Then they “Assigned students whose test scores showed they were not yet ready for college classes to the face-to-face orientation” (Law, 2014, p. 11). Intensive advising sessions were required for every student who was assigned the face-to-face orientation prior to the actual orientation. Then, assigned advisors were required to make personal contact with new student orientation students during the first weeks of class to asses their progress and offer support. Based on these actions, it was found that students felt better prepared. “Students assigned to the face-to-face orientation remained enrolled in 92 percent of their classes, about the same as those were not required to do the orientation because they were better prepared” (Law, 2014, p. 11).

The fourth strategy that the college implemented was that they set up an early alert system and student coaching. “By the midpoint of the semester, it may be too late to help a struggling student recover. We wanted to be sure we could quickly get to students who needed help getting back on track” (Law, 2014, p. 11). Faculty was able to alert an adviser when a student began to struggle early in a class. The college also established a network of mentors and student coaches to “intervene with students when an alert is triggered” (p. 11). Based on this new implementation, it was found that “Students who worked with the advisers after receiving an alert were highly likely to stay enrolled” (Law, 2014, p. 12).

Lastly, the fifth strategy the college implemented was enhancing the My Learning Plan Tool. “We wanted students to have a tool for up-to-the-minute guidance on where they stand in meeting graduation requirements” (Law, 2014, p. 12). The college created an online tool so that students could “map out their courses several terms in advance” (Law, 2014, p. 12). The college promoted the tool and explained to students during their orientation how to use it. It was found that “Students who completed the plan had a significantly higher success rate than those who did not” (Law, 2014, p. 12). Based on these implementations within the college, positive results have impacted first-time college students, first-time minority students, and first time college students in developmental courses.

Husain (2012) discussed the development of a persistence and retention department at Gaston College. “It was through this comprehensive process that the college confronted the high level of attrition and low retention and persistence rates of at-risk students” (p. 40). To create the program, the research team focused on proven initiatives due to a lack of financial assistance.

Husain was hired as the Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management at the college and “secured a Title III grant, which provided initial resources for the ambitious plans of the persistence and retention team” (2012, p. 41). Through the funding, multiple positions were created to work with student services and academic affairs. “Collaboration and creativity between academic affairs and student services have been vital to providing services to help our students succeed” (Husain, 2012, p. 41). Due to this program, positive results paid off for the college and the student population. “For example, the goal for the first year we had the Title III grant was to increase the retention

rate for at-risk students from 48 percent to 52 percent, and we surpassed that goal by increasing it to 67 percent” (Husain, 2012, p. 41).

A Matter of Degrees (2012) “provides a first look at the data on promising practices. These are educational practices for which there is emerging evidence of success” (p. 3). Surveys (four) were collected “and together provide a comprehensive understanding of educational practices on community college campuses and how these practices influence students’ experiences” (A Matter, 2012, p. 4).

The researchers stated that “No matter what program or practice a college implements, it is likely to have a greater impact if its design incorporates the following principles:” (A Matter, 2012, p. 5) a strong start, clear, coherent pathways, integrated support, high expectations and high support, intensive student engagement, design for scale, and professional development. Promising practices for community college student success emerged from the report.

One of the themes that emerged from the report was for community colleges to plan for success. This can be done by assessment and placement, orientation, academic goal setting and planning and registration before classes begin. “Research suggests that students who need developmental education and enroll in the proper courses during their first term are more likely to complete their developmental sequence than are students who need developmental education” (A Matter, 2012, p. 8).

Another theme that emerged for student success in terms of degree completion was for community colleges to initiate success. This can be done through accelerated, or fast-track developmental education, first year experience, student success courses, and learning communities. “The longer it takes a student to move through developmental

education into a credit program, the more likely he or she is to drop out” (A Matter, 2012, p. 14).

Lastly, community colleges can sustain success through class attendance, alert and intervention, experiential learning beyond the classroom, tutoring, and through supplemental instruction. Researchers have found that “students’ class attendance is the best predictor of academic performance in college-it more reliably predicts college grades than do high school GPA, SAT scores and other standardized admissions tests, study habits, and study skills” (A Matter, 2012, p. 19).

Rath, Rock, and Laferriere (2013) identified multiple reasons why community college students leave school while also detailing practices and strategies that need to be implemented to increase retention graduation rates. Multiple issues were noted to lead students to dropping of school. Inadequate academic preparation was found to be a contributor. “Many students arrive at college without the academic foundation necessary to excel. This sets students up for failure and often causes them to waste time and money on remedial education” (et, al., 2013, p. 3). Remedial education can either lead a student to success or hinder a students’ progress. “Almost 50% of 2-year community college students are required to take expensive and time consuming remedial courses that do not provide college credit, but increase a student’s chances of dropping out. Approximately \$3 billion is spent each year on remedial education” (et, al., 2013, p. 3). Financial aid was also found to be an issue with college retention and degree completion at the community college level. “It is estimated than average annual budget of \$15,000 is required for students to cover tuition, books, food, housing, and transportation costs” (et, al., 2013, p. 3). Lack of non-academic skills is a contributor to lack of student retention. Many

students lack social skills, study habits, and time management strategies, necessary to succeed in college. “Expectations of these skills are often left unspoken, leaving students confused or discouraged when they receive negative feedback or poor grades” (et, al., 2013, p. 3). Another reason why students do not complete community college is other obligations. “Community college students disproportionately face work, family, and other competing duties outside of the classroom that make it difficult to complete their degree” (et, al., 2013, p. 3).

The researchers identified multiple solutions to increase the number of degree completions, students graduating, and retention. “States and community colleges must implement and support promising practices and strategies to improve community college retention and graduation rates” (et, al., 2013, p. 3). It was found that curriculum alignment, remedial educational reform, early college experiences, student supports, financial aid and funding incentives, supportive transfer policies, and program and labor market outcome alignment all contribute to increasing student retention and degree completion. Curriculum alignment was one important factor contributing to student success. “High school and college curriculums should be aligned so students enter college prepared and ready to learn” (et, al., 2013, p. 4). To reform remedial education, “States and college systems are implementing new reforms such as: fast-track courses, learning communities, and embedded supports in entry-level courses to reform remediation” (et. al, 2013, p. 4). The researchers encouraged increased early exposure for students. “Dual enrollment and summer bridge programs prepare students for college by exposing them early to college culture and coursework” (et, al., 2013, p. 4). Student supports were also found to be a contributing factor toward retention at the collegiate

level. “When students receive the academic, social and career supports they need, they remain in school and achieve success” (et, al., 2013, p. 4). Transfer policies are also very important when “28% of bachelor degree earners began their studies at the community college, and 47% took at least one community college course” (et., al, 2013, p. 4).

Transfer policies should be supportive for students at the community college level so that students can continue toward earning a 4-year college degree. Lastly, program and labor market outcome alignment is a contributing factor toward retention. “Students should receive career counseling to take advantage of labor market indicators, and community colleges and states should implement the latest technologies to provide accurate, up-to-date, labor market information” (et., al, 2013, p. 4).

Cusseo (n.d.) identified the seven key principles that first-year programs or practices that should be implemented as central principles of student success. “The central principles of student success are those that validate students as individuals, generate a sense of relevance or purpose, balance challenge with support, and encourage students to learn in a manner that is active, interactive, reflective and mindful” (p. 9).

The first principle for student success is personal validation; “student success is promoted when students feel personally *significant*- i.e., when they feel welcomed by the college, recognized as individuals, and that they matter to the institution” (Cuesseo, n.d., p. 7). Self-efficacy was listed as the second principle of student success. “Student success is more likely to be experienced when students believe that their *individual effort* matters, i.e., when they believe they can exert significant influence or control over their academic and personal success” (Cuesseio, n.d., p. 7). This can be implemented through college-entry assessments, summer bridge programs, supplemental instruction, and

through honors courses.

Personal meaning was listed as a way to promote students success. “Student success is enhanced when students find *meaning* and *purpose* in their college experience- i.e., when they perceive *relevant connections* between what they’re learning in college and their current or future life” (Cuesseio, n.d., p. 7). This concept can be implemented through developmental academic advising, first-year seminars that process *long-range planning* for careers, reality-based learning experiences, and experiential learning opportunities.

Social integration was also stated as a way to increase student success and is “augmented by *human interaction, collaboration*, and the formation of *interpersonal connections* between the student and other members of the college community-peers, faculty, staff, and administrators” (Cuesseio, n.d., p. 8). This principle can be implanted through new student orientation programs, collaborative and cooperative learning practices, and learning communities.

Personal reflection also helps promote student success. “Students are more likely to be successful when they step back and reflect on what they are learning and elaborate on it, transforming it into a form that relates to what they *already know* or have *previously experienced*” (p. 9). This concept can be implemented by “writing-to-learn assignments that encourage students to reflect on what they are learning and connect it to their personal experiences or what they have previously learned” (Cuesseio, n.d., p. 9).

Lastly, self-awareness promotes student success when “students gain greater awareness of their learning styles, learning habits, and thinking patterns” (Cuesseio, n.d. p. 9). This can be implemented by having students reflect on the steps they take when

problem solving or making choices. It was also noted to encourage students to “complete self-assessment instruments designed to promote personal awareness of learning styles and habits” (Cuesseio, n.d., p. 9). It was noted by the researcher that the following are core characteristics of effective program delivery: Intentional (purposeful), proactive, intrusive, diversified, collaborative, centralized, and empirical (evidentiary). “Effective programs depend not only on program content, but also on their process of delivery” (Cuesseio, n.d., p. 11).

AFT of Higher Education (2011) identified ways for colleges to improve retention and attainment including implementation strategies. It was recommended to

1. Strengthen preparation in preK-12 by increasing the public support provided to school systems and the professionals who work in them.
2. Strengthen federal and state student assistance so students can afford to enter college and remain with their studies despite other obligations.
3. Institute or expand student success criteria along the lines of student success elements.
4. Coordinate learning objective with student assessment.
5. Provide greater government funding and reassess current expenditure policies to increase support for instruction and staffing.
6. Improve the longitudinal tracking of students (AFT, 2011, p. 5).

The report also recommended multiple implementations to “ensure that curriculum and assessment materials translate into real gains for students” (AFT, 2011, p. 4). It was noted that faculty need to be responsible for leading discussions in regard to student success to help students succeed. It was also recommended that staff be involved in the process of

academic advising and career counseling. Implementation of common elements for student success “not only should respect differences among disciplines and programs, but also should strive for an integrated educational experience for students” (AFT, 2011, p. 4). Lastly, in regard to assessing effectiveness of student success, academic programs and student services “should not be used to evaluate performance of individual faculty or staff” (p. 4).

Student and Institutional Perspectives

Mondisa and McComb (2014) examined the “similarities and differences in students’ perceptions of connectedness with a social community and their satisfaction with their current situations across both gender and graduate/undergraduate status” (p. 920). To conduct the study, an online survey instrument was administered to female and male undergraduate and graduate engineering students at a large, Midwestern university. The survey questions were based “on the constructs of connectedness and satisfaction as perceived by respondents in relation to their group affiliations and community relations” (Mondisa & McComb, 2014, p. 920). The sample included 164 students.

Results of the study reflect differences in gender of undergraduate and graduate engineering students and their perceptions of their social community. The researchers noted that “both male undergraduate and male graduate populations perceive a lower level of connectedness as compared to their female counterpart populations” (Mondisa & McComb, 2014, p. 926). The researchers also stated that “this research may contribute to an understanding of how different school populations experience and rate connectedness with the intent to create and model opportunities for building social community con

campus” (Mondisa & McComb, 2014, p. 926). Student connectedness that they feel on campus can lead to whether a student completes their courses for degree completion.

Gard, Paton, and Gosselin (2012) researched students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their transfer experiences. A transfer student cohort was the focus of the study “regarding their experiences in transitioning from lower division community college enrollment to upper-division, baccalaureate work” (p. 833). Interviews were conducted amongst the students along with a follow-up survey. A group of 14 students discussed their perceptions of transferring as it related to the general areas of academic advisement, communication, financial aid, academic preparation, and psychosocial factors. The researchers noted that the research subjects “were students enrolled in the first term of a university program after transferring from two different community colleges” (et, al, 2012, p. 835).

The research findings identified three main factors that hindered a successful transfer experience. The factors were: (a) the quality of academic advisement, (b) access to financial aid, and (c) social and cultural issues. “This study found that 67% of students expected the academic rigor at the university to be much harder. However, in actuality, after attending their first semester, only 25% of the students perceived that the academic rigor was indeed much harder compared to the community college” (et, al., 2012, p. 846). The findings also pointed out that close family relationships, cultural perspectives, and economic considerations play are important to the transfer process. The findings “indicate that communication about the cost of university programs should occur much earlier in the community college experience” (et, al., p. 847). Lastly, findings suggested “that

inaccurate advising resulting in prolonged enrollment is the major cause of student dissatisfaction with the transfer process” (et, al., 2012, p. 848).

Cherif, Adams, Movahedzadeh, Martyn, and Dunning (2014) conducted a study asking faculty members from two-year and four-year institutions to gain their perspective on why students fail courses in colleges or fail out of college. The study sample consisted of 190 faculty members.

Most believed that “too many students come to college without the necessary preparation. They lack numerous academic skills, such as critical thinking, writing skills, and math and science backgrounds” (et, al., 2014, p. 8). It was stated that these skills are necessary and should be learned in high school. Some of the respondents “thought that the faculty or teaching had failed, the college had failed, or some of the courses were too heavy on content” (et, al., 2014, p. 8). Some even stated that they felt there were too many problems in online course and that students were not well prepared during high school for college learning. The respondents noted that “a significant number of students come to college with poor academic backgrounds, and they lack prerequisites for college courses” (et. al., 2014, p. 9). Lastly, respondents claimed that lack of motivation and/or interest “and thus they fail to invest the effort, time, and energy needed to complete college work” (et, al., 2014, p. 9). Lack of self-responsibility and time management was also believed to be why students are not successful in college. It was noted that lack of self-responsibility leads to “an attitude that they developed in high school, which means that attending is enough to get a passing grade in a given course” (et, al., 2014, p. 9).

Booth, Cooper, Karandjeff, Purnell, Schiorring, and Willett (2013) identified multiple themes that students identified for student success. The study, “asked nearly 900 students from 13 California community colleges what *they* think supports their educational success, paying special attention to the factors African Americans and Latinos cite as important to their achievement” (p. 2).

According to students who participated in the study, six success factors were identified. Students need direction, have a goal, and know how to achieve it. Students need to stay focused and engaged. Students also stated that they need to feel connected to the community college and they need to feel valued. Five themes emerged “that can inform college initiatives to increase completion through targeted support” (et, al., 2013, p. 6).

- Acknowledge students as key agents in their own educational success while highlighting that the motivation learners bring to college may not be enough to guarantee completion.
- Speak directly to the need to teach students how to succeed.
- Highlight the value of providing support that helps students experience multiple success factors.
- Underscore the importance of comprehensive service delivery to particular populations.
- Recognize the important role the entire community college plays in student success, but emphasize the need for faculty leadership (et, al., 2013, p. 6).

The researchers also identified multiple strategies “to consider when planning for support initiatives” (et, al., 2013, p. 6). First, colleges need to foster students’ motivation.

Second, colleges must teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment. Third, colleges need to structure support to ensure all “six success factors” are addressed. Fourth, colleges need to provide comprehensive support to historically underserved students to prevent the equity gap from growing. Lastly, everyone has a role to play in supporting student achievement, but faculty must take the lead.

Student Success Programs and Courses

Crisp and Taggart (2013) conducted a narrative review in the fall of 2008 investigating community colleges in regard to learning communities, supplemental instruction, and student success courses. The studies “involved an empirical investigation or evaluation of learning communities, student success courses, or supplemental instructions” and focused on the community college level (p. 117-118). The studies investigated the impact of the program on students. The researcher identified studies that highlighted each program type.

The findings indicated that “learning communities have a positive impact or are positively related to student retention, grades, course completion rates, social and academic integration, and/or faculty/student perceptions” (Crisp & Taggart, 2013, p.122). The researcher noted that out of 16 studies, “four failed to find that learning communities have a positive impact on student retention and/or grade point averages” (Crisp & Taggart, 2013, p. 122). The researcher noted that the findings indicated learning communities fostered a better experience intellectually for students. Findings suggested that students who completed student life skills courses were more likely than students who did not complete the course to attain one of the following:

- a) earning a community college credential,
- b) transferring to the state university system, and
- c) remaining enrolled in college after five years (Crisp and Taggart, 2013, p. 123)

The researcher stated that student life skills courses are a place where students can form relationships with faculty and students to help them in the social and academic aspect of attending college. “Moreover, participants revealed that student success courses may help students develop study skills, learn about the college, and obtain advice about courses” (Crisp & Taggart, 2013, p. 123-124). The findings of the review also suggested that supplemental instruction “has been shown to be positively related to student retention, grades, and course completion or success” (Crisp & Taggart, 2013, p. 124).

Hulbert (2014) explored an experimental program at a New York community college that is tripling the odds of student success. The program is designed to maximize a students’ chances of earning a college degree (p. 6). “The program is intended primarily for low-income students with moderate remedial needs, and it accepts applicants on a first-come, first –served basis” (Hulbert, 2014, p. 7). As noted by the researcher, college success seminar courses are also required to help with academic and life skills. Students must be full-time and meet with an adviser to help arrange their schedule and track their progress. In return, students receive a free unlimited MetroCard good for the next month. Students who stay on track have a portion of their tuition waived that is not already covered by financial aid. The program is called ASAP- Accelerated Study in Associate Programs. The ASAP program “spends roughly \$3,900 annually per student, on top of the \$9,800 that the CUNY community college system

spends on each of its full-time students every year-yet if you calculate expenditures per student who actually graduates, it saves money” (Hulbert, 2014, p. 8).

The results of the ASAP program have been positive and successful. The developers of the program set a goal of a three-year graduation rate of 50 percent- and the program as exceeded their graduation rate goal according to the data of the university. A third of students who enrolled in the program graduated in 2 ½ years (compared with 18 percent of the control group. The success of the program lies with outside forces beyond the classroom. “The program enlists extra tutors and caps some classes at 25 students, but otherwise doesn’t touch pedagogy. Instead, it aims to counter the community college culture of early exits and erratic stops and starts” (Hulbert, 2014, p. 7). Hulbert also stated that postsecondary success is closely dependent on age as well. “Timing matters. Miss out on getting a postsecondary credential by 26, and your odds of ever earning one drop” (Hulbert, 2014, p. 7).

Cho and Karp (2013) researched whether “student success course enrollment, as well as student and institutional characteristics, has positive associations with shorter-term student outcomes, including earning any college credits within the first year and persistence into the second year” (Hulbert, 2013, p. 86). Data for the study derived from the Virginia Community College System along with using prior study information from Florida based research. The research from Florida was from all 28 community colleges within the state. “This study tracked a cohort of students over 17 terms and compared students who enrolled in a student success course” (Hulbert, 2013, p. 87). The dataset for the Virginia study contained 23,822 student-unit records that included all community college students enrolled within the system for the first time at their institution in the

summer or fall semesters of 2004. “This includes part-time students and those students who may have earned some credits at another institution” (Hulbert, 2013, p. 88). For the study, students that were “enrolled in at least one course that would be in line with our definition of a student success course—a course that orients students towards college, providing them with study skills, information on the institution and general advising” (Hulbert, 2013, p. 88).

The findings indicated that there “are clear positive associations between enrollment in a student success course in the first semester and the short-term outcomes of credit attainment and second-year persistence” (Hulbert, 2013, p. 101). Evidence was found within the study that suggested “students who were referred to even the lowest levels of developmental mathematics were more likely to earn credits (and in particular, college-level credits) within the first year if they enrolled in a student success course in their first term” (Hulbert, 2013, p. 101). Based on this research study, college success courses have a positive connection with student success at the community college level in regard to degree completion.

O’Gara, Karp, and Hughes (2009) investigated student success courses in two community colleges in urban areas. The study was qualitative in nature with data collection consisting of phone calls, e-mails, mailings, and text messages to contact participants and scheduled follow-up interviews. The final sample of students that were interviewed during the spring semester included 44 students from both colleges. The study sample, contained more female students and was ethnically diverse as reflective of the community college system nationwide. In terms of the study, the student success course is “usually aimed at new students, provides participants with information about

the college, help in academic and career planning, and techniques to improve study habits and other personal skills” (et, al., 2009, p. 199). As stated by the researchers, the goal of these types of courses is to help students adjust to the new collegiate environment and to provide tools those students may need to be successful in postsecondary education.

The findings of the study indicated that these types of courses are an “essential resource for students, in large part because the various benefits reinforce one another and magnify their influence” (et, al., 2009, p. 195). Benefits include but are not limited to: information about the college and other courses, study skills, and students build relationships among peers and professors. The researchers stated that due to these courses, students were actually *using* the services as a result of the college success course. “They attributed their willingness to access services such as tutoring to the increased comfort they felt on the college campus as a result of the success course” (et, al., 2009, p. 215).

Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007) reported on findings of a research analysis on the relationship “between enrollment in student success courses and student outcomes using a dataset on Florida community college students” (p. 2). Researchers from the CCRC-Community College Research Center used statistical models to see if student success courses still appear to be related to positive outcomes based on prior research “even after controlling for student characteristics and other factors that might also influence the relative success of the students who take such courses” (et, al., 2007, p. 2). Students from a cohort were tracked for 17 consecutive terms and “examined the percentage of these students who completed a credential (a certificate or an associate degree) during that time period” (et, al., 2007, p. 2). Logistic regressions were used to

control for the characteristics of students that could be related to their decision to enroll in an SLS course (student life skills) or the completion of the course.

It was found that enrollment in an SLS course had a positive marginal effect on a student's chances of earning a credential, persisting, or transferring. The researchers stated that "While we have not controlled for every possible factor that could create a difference between those who enrolled in SLS courses and those who did not, we have controlled for covariates that are well-established and commonly used in the research community" (et, al., 2007, p. 5). Implications for the research may lead community colleges to "consider expanding requirements that students take SLS courses" (et, al., 2007, p. 5).

Transfer Students

Wang (2009) examined baccalaureate attainment and college persistence among high school students who had attended community colleges first and transferred to four-year institutions. Wang tested the research using logistic regression models to predict student attainment. As defined in the study, attainment refers to the attainment of a bachelors degree.

The data used for the research study came from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study. The sample consisted of over 2,300 students who enrolled in community college during 1992 and 1993 soon after high school graduation. "For the purpose of this study, only community college beginners who eventually transferred to a four-year institution were retained. As a result, 786 cases (roughly 34% of the community college sample) make up

the dataset” (Wang, 2009, p. 575). Two logistic regression models were used to predict who earned a bachelor’s degree versus did not earn a bachelor’s degree and those who persisted in postsecondary education versus those who did not persist.

The findings suggested that the “educational outcomes of community college transfers can be explained, to some extent, by the combined influence of various personal, sociological, and psychological factors, as well as student experience in postsecondary education” (Wang, 2009, p. 581). The researcher suggested that for a community college transfer student to obtain a bachelor’s degree, it depends on demographics, high school, and college experience. Students who earned a higher GPA from a community college tended to be more likely to continue collegiate enrollment at a postsecondary institution. It was also noted that students who were on an academic curriculum were more likely to obtain a bachelor’s degree compared to those in another curriculum track. It was also stated that “Community college transfers who started out as baccalaureate aspirants in the 12th grade have better chances in earning a bachelor’s degree” (Wang, 2009, p. 582).

21st Century Community Colleges

Mullin (2012) examined measures of students success, specifically focusing on how they apply to community colleges. For the research study, two units of analyses were measured: the institution and the individual student. The framework for the study interprets success in one of four categories: institutional counts, institutionally derived values, individual counts and individually based derived values.

Mullin introduced a new way for community colleges to determine student learning at an institutional level through the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project. Through the project, several areas of learning as appropriate outcomes for community colleges to measure. “These include such areas as analytical reasoning and critical thinking, communication, innovative and creative thinking, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork and collaborative skills, global understanding and citizenship, and content or career- specific skills and knowledge” (Mullin, 2012, p. 137). Mullin stated that “College leaders should be invested in the dialogue of how to best measure students’ success at the community college level” (Mullin, 2012, p. 139).

In terms of an organization, community colleges in the United States are coalitions of assorted individuals and interest groups. This means that the success of community colleges and how success is defined varies by individuals and institutions. Within the past fifteen years, there has been a shift in education making free dual enrollment courses available to more high school students so that students will be more “college ready.” However, community colleges are forced to change with the times at a very drastic pace in order to survive and remain a staple on affordable education. This is due to economic and political changes that continue to occur and impact these institutions. As stated by Pusser & Levin (2009),

Many community colleges today face a funding crisis,
enrollment growth that strains capacity, unsuitable rates
of developmental education, unpredictable shifts in labor
market demand, growing competition for enrollments and
revenue from for-profit providers, and a loss of leadership of daunting

proportions through retirements (p. 4).

Community colleges are unique in that many stakeholders have an interest and influence them. They are important at multiple levels including the local, state, federal, and global level and benefit multitudes.

According to Pusser & Levin (2009), “It is therefore imperative that the institutions and their constituents, policymakers, scholars, practitioners, representatives of business and industry, and other stakeholders collaborate in support of the renewal of these essential institutions” (p. 4). Another tremendous impact of community colleges, besides the economic and political influences, is the students who are enrolled and benefit from them. Pusser & Levin stated that community colleges provide benefits to many constituents, but their primary responsibility is to students, and re-inventing these colleges can only take place with the needs and realities of students. Pusser & Levin also pointed out that “Community college students have varying life circumstances, the overwhelming majority is at an economic level where they must work, and half of community college students work full time and can be considered workers who attend college, not students who work” (p.5). An act called the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009 passed the House of Representatives and went on to the Senate to be debated. In the act, it included federal policies that could increase community college and student success include: increasing financial aid and Pell grants, improving facilities, requiring states to do more longitudinal studies focusing in community colleges, professional development for faculty, and common assessments. State recommendations on improving community colleges were also mentioned including: funding allocations for post-secondary education, innovation in training and

credentialing, standards alignment, transfer levels, and institutional policies.

Unfortunately, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009 did not survive in the Senate.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and faculty of one community college on the factors that facilitate or inhibit collegiate student success toward associate degree completion. The findings of this case study may be important in determining how students can be successful while attending community college in North Carolina but also will help identify the factors that facilitate or inhibit community college success in terms of associate degree completion. This study and its findings may influence and impact community college retention and completion rates throughout the state.

Research Design

This qualitative case study focused on the perceptions of students, administrators, and the faculty of one community college on factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion. This helps “bind” the case by place to ensure that “the study remains reasonable in scope” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 547). The qualitative case study was a single case study as it focused on one community college. Also, it was an intrinsic case study which means that it was a study of a specific case (community college) being studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548). As noted by Baxter and Jack, a case study should be considered by a researcher when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the

phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (2008, p. 545). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described key characteristics of qualitative research. For the case study, field work must be conducted to collect qualitative data. Rich narrative descriptions provide in-depth understanding of behavior. A qualitative case study is a different approach in regard to research as it “facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544).

Participants

Due to the study being a qualitative case study, all participants of the study were employed by, enrolled in, or graduated from the same community college being investigated in North Carolina. This study included 10 community college professionals and 5 student participants. Five participants of the study were administrators employed by a single institution. The sampling population consisted of the Dean of Students, Director of Counseling, Director of Soar, and the Vice President of Academics and Student Services. Included in the interviews was a Dean over one of the satellite campuses and members of the faculty who were academic content instructors were also interviewed.

Varied and specific information was emphasized through purposeful sampling by considering the characteristics of the individual members of a sample while also considering specific characteristics that were directly related to the research questions (DeVault, 2016). These individuals were purposefully selected for the case study to

increase the interpretive qualitative data sample for further analyses. A total of 15 individuals were interviewed. This number was sufficient to identify emerging themes.

The participants were selected through sampling consisting of both snowball and sampling specifically related to the research study focus. Snowball or the chain sampling approach was used to locate information-rich key informants (Patton, 2002). Snowballing is a “Procedure by which respondents are recruited for interviews or group discussions by means of informal contact between them. So one respondent successfully recruited suggests others known to them who might similarly be eligible (Definition, 2016).”

An email was sent to the community college president obtaining permission to conduct the case study. Notification by email was sent to all possible participants explaining the research study. All participants acknowledged an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study to examine the factors that contribute to associate degree completion at the community college level.

- 1) What support systems or resources are in place at the community college to assist students with degree completion?
- 2) What factors in the college student success course at this community college facilitate or inhibit successful degree completion?

Researcher's Role

For the qualitative case study, the role of the researcher was to be the interviewer to gain a deeper and focused understanding of the community college. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the community college in a location chosen by each participant.

Data Collection

Mountain Community College was the pseudonym used for the community college in focus of the case study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through interview protocol for data collection. As stated by McMillian & Schumacher (2010), due to conducting research through interviews amongst multiple individuals, understandings and explanations will have complexities with multiple perspectives.

The interviews focused on participant perspectives by “focusing on participants’ understanding, descriptions, labels, and meanings” (p. 321). All of the case study participants were either directly involved with students who attended the community college through administrative positions or instructor positions, or participants were enrolled in or had graduated from an associate degree program at the community college.

Graduates from the community college were not interviewed on campus but in a location convenient to the participant. Each participant’s name was disguised in the form of a pseudonym to protect anonymity. An interview guide was used to create and establish a protocol for the interviews. During the interview process, probes were asked to gain further insight to analyze responses and identify other emerging themes. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

The researcher requested approval from the East Tennessee State University Internal Review Board (IRB) to gain permission to conduct the case study. The IRB determined that all participants' privacy was protected and that each individual was provided informed consent.

After receiving approval from the community college president, each individual was contacted by email with a description of the study. The researcher requested their permission to interview them in regard to student success. Participants were informed on consent forms and they were discussed with each participant to ensure an understanding of their role. Permission was granted through written consent, meetings were scheduled amongst each individual to conduct a face-to-face, one-on-one interview. An interview guide was used to create and establish a protocol for the interviews. Every effort was made so that participants could be interviewed at a convenient time for them and all interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed.

Data Analysis

Triangulation and member checks were applied within the research of the case study to ensure methods of trustworthiness and credibility. Triangulation is the process of “asking the same research questions of different study participants and by collecting data from different sources and by using different methods to answer those research questions” (DeVault, 2016, p. 3). Member checks were applied by the researcher so that participants could verify their statements. The qualitative data provided from the interview transcripts were analyzed through the process of coding once each interview was completed and transcribed. Coding is the process of identifying distinct concepts

and categories within the interview data (Qualitative, 2009). During the coding process, raw qualitative data in the form of words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs are assigned codes or labels (Coding, n.d.). A set of priority codes were initially developed by the researcher that derived from the themes that emerged from the literature review (Tips, n.d.). Initially, open coding was utilized to find the selected codes. Later, axial coding was used to organize individual codes into categories. Then, the use of hierarchical coding was utilized to identify sub-codes (Coding, n.d.). Hierarchical coding is when codes are grouped into their own sub-code (Coding, n.d.). The data was broken down into first level concepts (master headings), and then second-level categories (subheadings) (Qualitative, 2009). After this information was collected through the coding process, a data table was created. The major categories derived from the interview data were organized with an explanation after them within the table under associated concepts (Qualitative, 2009). The table consisted of codes that emerged from the interview data that were not previously identified from the literature review. “‘Emergent codes’ are those ideas, concepts, actions, relationships, meanings, that come up in the data and are different than the pre-set codes” (Tips, n.d., p. 2).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Credibility and trustworthiness contain the following attributes in qualitative research: (a) prolonged engagement, (b) persistent observations, (c) triangulation, (d) referential adequacy, (e) peer debriefing, and (f) member checks (DeVault, 2016). Triangulation and member checks were applied within the research of the case study to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Triangulation is the process of “asking the same

research questions of different study participants and by collecting data from different sources and by using different methods to answer those research questions” (DeVault, 2016, p. 3). Two sets of interview questions were used for data collection. Administrators and instructors were asked the same questions by the researcher. Student and graduate participants were asked the same set of questions during the interview differing from the administrators and instructors. This process provided different sources of data based on participants’ experiences. Member checks were utilized by the researcher so that participants could verify their statements. “Member checks occur when the researcher asks participants to review both the data collected by the interviewer and the researchers’ interpretation of that interview data” (DeVault, 2016, p. 4). This process was used to ensure trustworthiness with each participant and the researcher.

Due to the qualitative study being a case study, the data collection that occurs will define the data and contribute to the interpretation of the data (Devaul, 2016). Through generalization, this research study can be conducted or “transferred” to other community colleges consisting of the same demographic characteristics of this case study. Transferability “is the generalization of the study findings to other situations and contexts” (DeVault, 2016, p. 4). The data collected would vary based on the specific case. This can be achieved by the qualitative researcher enhancing the “transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumption that were central to the research” (Trochin, 2006, p. 1-2). Purpose sampling was applied by the researcher “to address the issue of transferability since specific information is maximized in relation to the context in which the data collection occurs” (DeVault, 2016, p. 4). Lastly, through confirmability, the results of the research study could be “confirmed or

corroborated by others” (Trochin, 2006). The researcher documented the procedures of the study, the interviews, and the themes that emerged from the interviews in relation to the specific research questions and the reviewed literature to enhance the confirmability of the qualitative case study (Trochin, 2006). The researcher also discussed the instances that contradicted prior observations in relation to themes revealed through the literature review while also discussing potential biases and judgments (Trochin, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

In order for the researcher to follow ethical protocol procedures, IRB permission and protocol were followed. The president of the community college was contacted formally to obtain vocal and written permission for the case study to be conducted and this information was presented to the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board. After receiving permission from the community college president and the East Tennessee State University Internal Review Board, all participants of the case study were contacted by email with a formal letter to explain the qualitative research.

Before interviews were conducted, permission was gained by each individual through written consent. Interviews were conducted among ten individuals employed by the college and five students attending the college. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants’ identities and to keep the name of the community college private to ensure that the identities of participants were protected. As McMillian and Schumacher (2010) stated, other considerations were taken into account including the place of interviews, changing of situations to protect identity, place of interviews and context sensitivity in

gaining participant perspectives (p. 322). All interviews were on a voluntary basis and no form of compensation was given.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three presents the research methodology of the case study. Information in regard to the research design, research questions, and the researcher's role within the qualitative case study were explained. The population sample, data collection methods and the data analysis methods were detailed. Lastly, the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative case study were addressed along with the ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and the faculty of one community college on factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion. The study was a qualitative case study as it focused on one community college. For the purpose of the research study, degree completion was defined as graduating with an associate degree. Data were collected through interviews with 15 participants associated with a single community college located in North Carolina. An interview script was used during each interview and follow-up questions, or probes, were used to gain further meaning. The participants were selected through sampling consisting of both snowball and sampling specifically related to the research study focus. The research examined the perceptions of administrators, instructors, students, and within the community college. The following research questions guided this study.

- 1) What support systems or resources are in place at the community college to assist students with degree completion?
- 2) What factors in the college student success course at this community college facilitate or inhibit successful degree completion?

The primary focus in collecting data was to examine the perceptions of administrators, instructors, students and graduates of a single community college located in North Carolina. The study consisted of 15 participants who have a specific connection with the community college. Five participants were administrators employed by the college, five participants were instructors employed by the college, three were students currently enrolled at the college working towards their associate degree, and two participants were former graduates of the community college who obtained an associate degree. The participants were selected and were asked to volunteer to participate in this research study based on the prior criteria. Table 1 lists the participants in relation to the community college.

Table 1

Participants

Participants	Status/Content	Experience	Role at College
Participant 1	Graduate	Associate in Business	AB Graduate 1
Participant 2	Graduate	Associate in Art	AA Graduate 2
Participant 3	Student	Associate in Art Spring 2017	AA Student 1
Participant 4	Student	Freshmen Dual Enrollment	AA Student 2
Participant 5	Student	Associate in Art Spring 2017	AA Student 3
Participant 6	Math	15 years	Instructor 1
Participant 7	Humanities	20 years	Instructor 2
Participant 8	Humanities	23 years	Instructor 3
Participant 9	Humanities	13 years	Instructor 4
Participant 10	Math	21 years	Instructor 5
Participant 11	Dean	12 years	Administrator 1
Participant 12	VP of Academics/Student Services	1 year	Administrator 2
Participant 13	Director of SOAR	2 ½ years	Administrator 3
Participant 14	Dean of Students	5 years	Administrator 4
Participant 15	Director of Counseling	23 years	Administrator 5

Eight themes were identified as either facilitating or inhibiting student completion of an associate degree at the community college. These themes were: (a) curriculum, (b) advising, (c) support services, (d) relationships, (e) faculty status, (f) intrinsic motivation, (g) developmental courses, and (h) external factors.

Table 2

Themes from Interviews

Master Headings	Sub-Headings	Associated Concepts
Curriculum	Course Offerings, College Transfer Success Course, K-12 Alignment	Options, Flexibility, Instructor, Course Culture, Course Duration, Legislation
Advising	Placement in Correct Degree Program	Credit Creep, Complete Degree Faster
Support Services	Associate Degree Completion	SOAR, Academic Success Center, College Resources
Relationships	Departments, Instructors, Administrators, Students	Promote Academic Student Success at a personal level.
Faculty Status	Full-Time or Part-time (adjunct)	Instructor Availability to Students
Intrinsic Motivation	Goal Setting, Maturity	College Major, Career Latticing, Job Shadowing
Developmental Courses	Academic Course Success	Completion of AA Degree
External Factors	Personal, Attendance, Financial, Transportation, Childcare	Leads to Dropouts and inhibits AA degree completion

Table 3

Emergent Themes

Master Headings	Sub-Headings	Associated Concepts
Curriculum	Course Offerings, College Transfer Success Course, K-12 Alignment	Options, Flexibility, Instructor, Course Culture, Course Duration, Legislation
Advising	Placement in Correct Degree Program	Credit Creep, Complete Degree Faster
Relationships	Instructors, Administrators, Students	Promote Academic Student Success at a personal level.
Developmental Courses	Academic Course Success	Completion of AA Degree

Analysis of Research Questions

Curriculum

Course Offerings

One of the most ubiquitous themes that emerged from multiple interviews between administrators, instructors, and students was course offerings. Participants noted course options, flexibility, and the curriculum adjustment of the new college transfer success course that will be beginning in the fall of 2017, when discussing course offerings. One graduate, one student, and three instructors noted that it was important to offer courses that were more specific related to students intended major once they transfer to a four-year university.

Participant 1, a graduate of Mountain Community College who obtained an associate in business, stated:

“The only problem, like challenge I had was some of the business classes they offered were only offered like every other like semester, so there was two particular classes I had to take and they did not offer them that semester so that is the reason it took me three years to get my associates because I already had like five or six classes and there was no way that I could do two more classes on top of what I was doing. So I ended up having to take a semester off and wait till the next semester for those classes to be offered again.”

Participant 3, a current student at the college who will complete their associate in Arts degree in the Spring of 2017 stated that due to the college being a small college, it was short-staffed and course options were limited. They noted:

“They don’t offer a lot of the classes on the list, UGETZY, or something like that, they don’t offer a lot of those classes here, so I have to like nit-pick and stuff. Like when I choose a class I ask myself like, how would this class help me and my career goals and I try to reason with that and if I can’t I just do like uh, like based off of my interests or hobbies or something. I like to do puzzles so math, I really like math.”

Three instructors of the college also discussed the importance of course options to facilitate student completion of an associate degree. A humanities instructor, participant 7, who has been teaching at the college for 20 years stated:

“Options in terms of classes. This is transfer program really as opposed to our other associates in applied sciences but I would say options in terms of classes,

especially the second year the college has to offer, first year, I believe we are in pretty good shape.”

The instructor also noted that they believed course options at the community college should be considered a factor that inhibits student degree completion of an associate degree in terms of second year course options and stated:

“I would think so, and again, this would be more second year options, that might be more program specific intro electives that students would take entering a program, lets just say like ASU, or ETSU. So if you had a student who was interested in social work, having a transferable social work class that could count as their intro to social work class would be the issue. But they of course can get their basics like your Psychology, Sociology, History, Public Speaking, um, we are a small school, and we have to be creative in terms of our offerings to see how we can meet most of our student’s needs. I think that as we are working to be leaner and meaner with budget considerations across the state that are really putting pressure on small schools we’re needing to offer more online class offerings to address students who might have time constraints whether it be working during the day, needing to take courses or to complete their course work at night or visa versa or having specific days. I also think trying to see what motivates students so that way we can help them so that’s not a limitation is really important.”

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 23 years discussed how courses need to have more of a career focus early within the degree program to prevent student drop-out, especially with the younger generation of students.

“You know if you want to be a teacher, you ortta be in the classroom the very first semester or second, at least seeing, because a lot of our students are seeing, or are being

told, 'you would be a great nurse' without knowing that they are not even good at Science you know? You need to get in there and see very early on because this generation especially needs to make a connection with what I want to be and where am I at now? But if you put them in Psychology, English, History and Humanities courses, they are going to drop out early because they don't see how it connects with what they are going to be early on. We know that higher ed for adults um, andragogy, pedagogy, all that stuff, different than with kids. If I go in there and I am getting more American History and I didn't like History when I was in high school I am more likely to drop out but if you put me in an IT class where, because that is my major, I can stomach all the other stuff because I am seeing the future. I don't think we are making them understand the big picture, and I don't mean anything negative about our generation, this new generation, but it's not a wait and see, they want instant gratification."

Participant 9, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 13 years stated that the college provided flexibility for students and provided different methods of taking a course and noted:

"So what's great about these classes is not only students get the content, they get the experience of being in a college class with a college instructor and so those students are going to be much better prepared when they go on, plus they have this great class, so we are always looking for creative ways like that, that will help students get the classes they need whether that means they are online, or hybrid and I think that is one of the wonderful things about Mountain is that we are nimble enough to do that and we can meet those needs for our students."

College Transfer Success Course

Another specific aspect within the curriculum was the college transfer success course and how it is being updated, piloted, and revamped and the new course will begin in the fall of 2017. The goal of the college was to update the course for their accreditation process as a part of their QVP enhancement plan for SACS that will be evaluated by auditors. As noted by two administrators, it was redesigned and there are three versions of the college success course. Students that are obtaining their associate degree are required to take the college transfer success course. Within the college success course, Title IX information is covered in regard to the rights of students, safety, campus information, domestic and dating violence and other important college information. As stated by participant 14, the Dean of Students who has been in the position for 5 years:

“One thing we have um, tried to do is we have put in there a distance education module because we really want to orient our students to um, how to navigate internet courses, um because that is just increasing, um with what we do and at the university level, if they go on and so they won’t hit the pitfalls with that, um so that is one module. We have a career module to identify career goals early, and that is for the AS one, and for the transfer one, has a module to help them identify their college, four-year major and their four-year college choice early. So that way, you can see, if they identify their career choice and their university choice within the first semester, then that really avoids all kinds of issues in terms of taking classes you don’t need, starting in a major then deciding that it is not for you, you know so that is kind of the idea around that.”

Participant 15, the director of counseling, also discussed the changes for the future adjusted student success course that will be beginning in the fall of 2017:

“Recently, like starting in the fall, we are going to go with a new way of doing it. Just an online orientation program. Well, its not online, its hybrid, but the point is, its one we kind of created ourselves so I don’t know what to say about it until we do it but I hope that it going to be, that it covers the basis, the emphasis of it.”

The college transfer success course was a prevalent aspect of the curriculum theme due to the many suggestions provided by instructors, administrators, and students on how to best improve the course and how the course facilitates or inhibits student degree completion. Multiple instructors noted that the course needed to inform and teach students about soft skills to help them succeed in the college setting and to also help them with their transition of utilizing soft skills while in their career.

Participant 10, a mathematics instructor who has been an instructor at the college for twenty-one years stated that the original course was a very good course. However, the current course does not teach the soft skills that are needed at the academic level. They noted:

“It was taught with the On Course philosophy, the Chip Downing On Course, which was all about the um, the victim versus the creator mentality. We now teach ACA 122, which is for college transfer. This is a course that is dictated by the universities, that was what they wanted for students who were going to transfer under the articulation agreement. It’s useless; the course we teach now is useless in my opinion. I’ve not taught it. It doesn’t address study skills, personally responsibility; it is not designed to do that. If I were asked to teach that I would incorporate study skills, personal responsibility because that is what you need to be a successful transfer student.”

Participant 15, the director of counseling who has been employed by the college for 23 years, also discussed the original curriculum in the original college student success course:

“Well, we for a long time, had a course that was um based on the textbook On Course based on the eight successful habits that students have. So we trained them right off the bat in you know, the soft skills you have to have to go to college because its not always about study skills and brain power. It’s about these other things like responsibility, following through, dealing with problems that come up, so we did that for a long time.

Participant 12, the Vice President of Academics and Student Services who has been in the position one year at the college, discussed the importance of a good student success course to promote associate degree completion at the college but noted that course sequencing and duration was crucial. It stated that:

“However, they [students] have to be able to get that course at the beginning, not at the end. The student success course in the second, third, fourth semester is too late, it has to be within the first semester. The student success course is not successful if it is not within the first semester. Whenever we restructured our new class that we are putting out in the fall, we piloted it now for a couple of semesters, everybody will take it in the fall, we built it in four modules so that it could be completed in 4-8 weeks because really and truly, if a student success class takes a full 16 weeks there is going to be parts of that class that the student would need before they get to it.”

The Vice President also noted that a student success course can also inhibit student completion of an associate degree based on the curriculum and the duration:

“Students don’t want to take it if they don’t understand what it is. Students don’t do optional so you have to make the course worthwhile. What students don’t like is having to take courses that they don’t see is helping them get to their goal. So a lot of the student success courses in some colleges and here at Mountain, end up being something other than what they were designed to be and end up having to put a lot more work into that class, than say a three hour class, and so they just don’t see the value in it so any course in a program, if it is not a value, valuable to that program, students will balk at it. So then what will happen is students will try to drop it but then again I don’t necessarily think you need a full 16 week student success course either. Primarily, what you want to do is give them the tools they need to be successful and tell them how to get in contact with resources and get them to talk to make some connections and get more comfortable and acclimated to the campus.”

Participant 6, a mathematics instructor who has taught at the college for 15 years noted that the success of the course also depends on the instructor of the course:

“Faculty members who do it well can have a tremendous impact. I don’t think myself, that I did that course very well, I don’t, I work much better with students one-on-one, larger group setting.”

Participant 7, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for twenty years and has taught the college success course, noted that students did not take it seriously.

“I believe that the college transfer success class in theory is a great idea in practice I am not sure how many students take it seriously. I think students that are highly motivated and have a good idea what their direction is and where they want to transfer

would find it very beneficial. Those who don't, feel that it is busy work, much like the ACA 111 college student success was and if there were a way to change that culture which has been a perpetual issue, ever since I have been at Mountain, I think that would really help students be prepared."

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 23 years and often teaches the college transfer success course, discussed that the course was too long being 16 weeks and that it needed to be cut down to 8 weeks.

"Its only a one credit class that students don't take it real seriously, it seems tedious for those who have been there a while and it almost seems premature for those who are first semester. I would say if we had to rank it, it is 80% effective and 20% not."

Lastly, participant 12, the Vice-President of Academics and Student services discussed the importance of aligning the state K-12 curriculum with the instructional goals of community colleges and universities within the state of North Carolina. This change would depend upon state legislation for this change to occur. It was noted that this would promote associate degree completion.

"The other area that we can do better in is alignment of high school, to community college, to university. I think one of the issues that we have been working on across the board is K-12 has certain goals, mission, that they are trying to get to, the community college has certain parameters, goals, mission, vision they are trying to get, universities has certain goals, mission, vision, they are trying to get to with their outcomes. The problem is none of those outcomes align. That is one of the reasons students say they are not prepared coming out of high school for college because they can't pass a placement test or they didn't do well on their college-SAT, ACT something

like that, a lot of times, the majority of the time the high school curriculum is not aligned with the university curriculum. It doesn't prepare them for what the university is wanting them to prepare. Same thing with the community college to universities so I think as educators, we need to do a better job of aligning curriculum from elementary to middle to high, to community college to university. So they have a pathway that is seamless that is building skill set that is along the continuum."

Advising

Correct Placement in Degree Program

In addition to curriculum being of importance to associate degree completion, advising emerged as another theme. Advising is important to associate degree completion so that students can be placed in the correct degree program to graduate as soon as possible and prevent student dropouts. By doing this, it prevents students from taking courses unrelated to their career field and prolonging degree completion impacting student morale. Multiple advisors and instructors discussed the importance of advising at the college for students.

Participant 6, a 15 year math instructor stated:

"We need good advising, very good advising, making sure that we get students in the courses that are appropriate for them."

Participant 12, the Vice-President of Academics and Student Services, stated that community colleges need to be aware of how to structure their academic programs and that the traditional 16 week courses can be influential and degree completion. He stated that:

“I think that community colleges first have to be mindful of how they structure programs. So that there is a coherent skill set that is being built after each class and skills build upon each other and go from different levels. Another thing that goes along with that is that they have to have proper advising so that they’re on the right track and they have a plan and one of the things that we have been working on here is looking at our advising model and making sure that our programs of study are in fact coherent and we don’t have a lot of repetition of skills in any other classes because one of the things that happens sometimes in programs is you get something called ‘credit creep’ in which you know programs keep adding classes to the program making the program much longer than a two-year program which really is what it was intended for so we have been trying to lower the number of credit hours in a program to try and keep them on the 64, 65, 67 instead of the 70 hours because time is a factor that has an impact on students completing. There has been plenty of studies that show the longer the class is or the longer the program is the success rates go down. The study was called ‘Time is a Factor’ they looked at it from a lot of different perspectives; even for classes, the traditional classes in a semester are 16 weeks and even 16 week classes are not optimum for completion, the shorter the completion time for the class the higher the completion rates so if you did it in 12 weeks or 8 weeks or something like that students tend to complete it in that so.”

Participant 14, the Dean of Students at the college also mentioned the “credit creep” in a similar way by stating:

“I think that good advising is really important in terms of completion, students who get frustrated with taking classes that they don’t need, or the program begins to take

longer than they need, or things of that nature really can cut into your retention. So really good quality advising is um- and to make sure that students are in the right program so that they are not starting down one path towards one career and then realize you know, that ‘I don’t want to do computer engineering and really where I always should have been was information systems,’ you know and that is all in the advising is helping a student understand the difference between those things that are close but not, but very different.”

Support Services

Promoting Degree Completion

Multiple support services at the community college emerged to facilitate associate degree completion. All administrators, instructors, and students identified various support services from academic to financial including, SOAR, counseling, and healthcare support that are available to the student population.

Participant 11, a Dean on campus who has been in the position for 4 years and formerly the Director of Enrollment Management Services for 8 years identified specific support services provided by the college stating:

“First of all, we have an early alert system that is supposed to trigger a counselor getting in touch with a student if their grades are starting to slip or they are starting to miss class or different factors so that we might determine what may be causing that. It is the instructor’s role to do that so it does rely heavily on the instructor to actually contact the students and alerting someone to see what is going on. We have tons of financial assistance available through federal Pell grants, scholarships, there is several different programs for financial aid, there is childcare assistance, there is tutoring. There is

numerous support services that we refer people to in the community you know if we find out that there having trouble paying power bills, whatever it might be, so that we can refer them to external sources to try and help with that, um the WIA program that's at Mountain, or actually it is WIOA now, the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act helps people get back on their feet, whatever it might be that they need in order to be able to stay in school. It also helps financially both education wise and personal.”

Participant 13, who has been the Director of SOAR at the college for 2 ½ years discussed the SOAR program that is federal funded. It was stated that there is a transfer counselor through SOAR to help students determine where they will transfer to once a student has completed 30 credit hours and to help them determine their major. They noted:

“We have tutoring in all subjects. We have one-on-one tutoring. We also have online tutoring. That is something new the college started last semester. In the SOAR program, we can provide almost anything that a student needs: tutoring, help them get registered for their classes, we help them financially with scholarship applications, and we will help them if they are dealing with personal issues. We refer them off campus to other resources. We do that because some may need help with housing, or need help with childcare expenses; we serve as a mediator between faculty and between other resources. If they are new students, they often don't know a lot of people on campus. We don't say 'just go here,' we walk with them to financial aid, the registrar, or the business office and introduce them. We don't just send them on their way because we know how most of our students are, even the older students. They are out of their comfort zone and often reluctant to ask questions.”

Participant 15, the Director of Counseling who has been employed by the college for 23 years also discussed the counseling services the department provides for prospective and current students. The counseling center provides career counseling, supportive counseling, along with college transfer counseling early in the student's academic journey. They noted that the counseling department tries:

“Not to do therapy but more supportive counseling and refer them out for mental health. Also crises counseling, if students are suicidal or have other problems, I've got to help them get connected to resources and deal with it in the moment. Job search assistance, resume writing, I do workshops for that, and then disability services, now is becoming a bigger area for me. That is when they first come, making sure they get accommodations if they have a disability like extra time on tests and stuff like that. Then the last one is academic assistance, if they are not doing well in classes, I can help them. I try to do coaching. Trying to help them once a week just a check in 'how's it going?' try to get them a tutor or try to get them into SOAR, um, I do a lot of different things but a lot of it is student support, mainly retention kind of stuff, trying to help them be successful here and like you said with completion, a lot of that is with completion.”

The Vice-President of Academics and Student Services discussed the academic support center and the tutoring services available to students enrolled at the college for free. He also discussed other services that are not necessarily what the college provides.

“We have a tutoring program in which they can get free tutoring, peer tutoring, we have an academic support center, and we have online tutoring, all that is free. We do have a health, a nurse practitioner that comes in, he actually works for us, but he also works with the clinic too. We have some health services too, um, we do have lots of

money for scholarships, we started an emergency fund for students if they don't have money to eat, they can go to student services and request a food voucher for the cafeteria in which they can eat and so we are looking to expand that. We had a student this past semester that ended up finding himself in a situation where he was homeless for a little while and staying in his car trying to, you know to do this, trying to figure out to help that person find a place to stay, you know, laundry, food, gas and stuff like that so we are trying to increase that.

Relationships

The theme of relationships at the community college emerged from the interviews facilitating associate degree completion. Relationships among colleagues and departments within the college were important along with relationships among instructors, students, and graduates to promote academic success in regard to associate degree completion. Many also noted that as a result of the community college being a smaller college, this created an advantage in building relationships with students.

Among Colleagues and Departments

One administrator at the college noted how important it was for departments within the college to have strong working relationships and to communicate with each other so that students can succeed.

Participant 15, the Director of Counseling, who has been in this role at the community college for 23 years discussed the small college atmosphere and stated:

“I think that we are small and we spend a lot of time with people. I do, I mean when I meet with someone as long and as often as we need to and I think that is kind of a

theme for the whole college. People get a lot more attention here and that helps people stick it out till the end.”

They also noted the relationship between the counseling department and the SOAR department:

“I just think, they do a lot of the same things I do and we kind of work together. Like if a student can’t get into SOAR then I’ll do whatever SOAR was going to do for them. So it is an example of how we don’t let anyone fall through the cracks you know. A lot of colleges don’t partner well with trio programs and it’s more of a competition kind of thing. I don’t know. We have always, like I said, I have been here twenty plus years and we have always had a really good relationship in terms of helping students and working together.”

Students

Two students and a graduate also noted how the relationships between their instructors at the college were important to them in their journey towards associate degree completion.

Participant 4, a dual enrollment student at the college who is in their second semester taking courses, discussed how helpful everyone at the college was and stated: “The thing I love about Mountain that I love so much is the relationship with students and teachers. It’s so much different than, really even high school because it is such a small school. I like that more than anything, the helpful teachers. I mean they are always available. Anytime I need anything, any kind of help, and if they, if it’s something that one teacher can’t do they will tell you who to go to.”

Participant 5, an Associate of Arts student who is in their final semester at the college and plans to graduate in the spring, also noted the relationships between the instructors and the students. When asked if they had any recommendations for what the college can do to facilitate student completion of the associate degree it was stated:

“The classes are great, the teachers are incredible, I mean all of the instructors that I have had here are great. The communication between students and instructors has always been good in my opinion.”

Graduates

Lastly, one of the graduates of the community college discussed the relationships at the college. Participant 2, an Associate of Arts graduate who transferred to a four-year university and obtained their Bachelor of Arts in Education, noted that:

“The faculty members were probably the most helpful. They really helped me figure out what I needed to do and gave me the confidence to do it. They were willing to go out of their way to get my stuff done and my goals accomplished.”

Participant 2 also noted the importance of relationships at the community college in relation to their educational journey. It was stated attending the community college was one of the best decisions they had made. When asked why:

“Because I saved a lot of money and I was able to um, stay closer to home where I wasn’t quite ready to just go out on my own but plus the education I learned there was a lot more valuable than the education I learned at my four year. It was more challenging, it was more relevant and you really felt like everybody knows your name at a community college which helps you grow as a student.”

When asked if relationships were important, they responded:

“Yes, because I feel that all students need that support when they get out of high school to be able to work in the world of college and eventually the world professionally, independently.”

Instructors

Multiple instructors discussed the importance of having excellent and strong relationships with their students to facilitate student completion of an associate degree. Instructors also discussed how it was important for them to know exactly who to contact at the college when students come to them with personal conflicts.

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has been teaching at the college for 23 years, stated that:

“I want to know who I call on that campus, who I send them to that can address whatever problem that comes up in their life and I have to realize that I can’t do that. I am the teacher, the advisor..., I can’t be their counselor, that would be unfair but on the other hand, nobody sees what goes on first hand with a student more than the instructor, nobody. And my students trust me, they will tell me things that I could not imagine living in, situations, if you don’t have food, forget math.”

Participant 9, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 13 years, discussed how the college does well in regard to relationships with instructors and students when prompted about support services the college provides. It was stated:

“We also have academic support through Math, English tutoring that we do a great deal of and I think one of the things that helps the most is having accessible faculty.

I have so many students who have sat right where you are sitting, we have walked through things, we have gotten them through papers and it has been a lot of work but if students are willing to approach their teachers, everybody here is willing to help students. We won't come to their house and do it for them but we have really caring faculty here and we want to see students succeed. We are here to help them and that's not something you might get at another institution."

Participant 10, a math instructor who has taught at the college for 21 years, also discussed the importance of relationships with students. They mentioned that due to the college being a smaller school, this was an advantage for the instructors and the students in facilitating associate degree completion.

"I think because we are small, we have the luxury of being personally invested in our students. Big schools have an advantage because they have a lot of programs and they can offer a lot of sections and a lot of choices-that's what you get from a big school. Being a small school, we have limited choices but more personal interaction with our students."

Participant 6, a mathematics instructor who has taught at the college for 15 years, also mentioned how faculty and student relationships are being impinged upon due to increasing workloads on the faculty as a result of state budget cuts.

"Mountain has traditionally, since I have been there had great academic support or tutoring um, the amount of time faculty spend with students outside of the classroom at Mountain is as good as any school I have ever been associated with and better. One of the things that I think has impinged upon that is increased faculty workloads with the budget crises and so faculty are teaching more and our faculty don't mind working hard but what

that does is if they are in the classroom more they have less time outside of the class to assist students with problems that they have and keeping them caught up with homework. But individual one-on-one instruction is very much needed with the non-traditional students. They need that kind of support both emotionally; a lot of the non-traditional students never thought about college, had never had the family support or the network that undergirds being successful and a lot of times I think faculty and, we have quality staff as well, having that kind of network of support for students outside of the classroom is absolutely vital for students who don't have that kind of network, emotional support that aides in completion."

Faculty Employment Status

Another theme that emerged from the interviews as well as the literature review was the discussion on faculty employment status of instructors employed at community colleges and the impact of degree completion. Both students and instructors mentioned the difference in full-time and adjunct instructors.

Students

Participant 5, a student at the college who will graduate with an Associate in Arts in the spring of 2017, mentioned the influx of adjunct instructors within their duration at the college when asked if there were less course offerings of some the arts classes. They implied that students were disappointed to see the full-time positions replaced with adjunct instructors and noted:

“Positions being turned from full-time in to part-time or the adjunct people that have been here for years. Stuff like that I have noticed. I have noticed that the some of the students are very happy here become a little bit-like ‘I can’t believe that happened”

Participant 3, also a current Associate in Arts student at the college, briefly mentioned adjunct instructors replacing full-time instructors when asked about recommendations that the college could do to facilitate student completion of an associate degree.

“I think its short staffed and not a lot of people to-like since I have been here they have gotten rid of, well, not really rid of, they just retired but let’s see, its five teachers since I have been here.”

Instructors

Instructors also discussed the importance of investing in faculty and having full-time faculty at the community college to facilitate associate degree completion.

Participant 6, a mathematics instructor who has taught math for 15 years at the college, stated:

“I think faculty need to be looked at as an asset rather than an expense. Expenses, if you have a business are to be minimized and I think to a certain extent community colleges have looked at faculty as an expense that’s to be minimized when they are really and truly their greatest asset and going through and cutting the number of full-time faculty and replacing them with adjuncts, is cutting the quality of what happens at a community college. Adjunct faculty get paid no benefits, reduced salary, they don’t, it’s not a full time career for them. It’s a sideline, we need full time faulty but if you go down

our hallway at Mountain, empty office-faculty member, empty office-faculty member, empty office-the number of empty offices has increased tremendously. The offices that have people in them, a lot of times are adjuncts now, shared by multiple people.”

When asked if the increase in adjunct instructors has been within the past five years, participant 6 responded:

“It has accelerated tremendously since the financial crises and its not rebounding. The economy is rebounding but that is not. Once they say we can build a building a pay for it and get part-time faculty, then they stick with that model.”

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 23 years, discussed how they felt that every instructor should have an educational background not just a content specific background to be an instructor.

“I think everyone in education should have a lot of education courses, not just be good at history, math, just because you have a masters in math does not mean you will be a good teacher.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation of students became a prominent theme from the interviews among instructors, students, and administrators at the college. This characteristic was identified as a factor that facilitates but also inhibits degree completion of an associate degree depending on the students.

Goal Setting

Both instructors and administrators discussed how goal setting was a primary factor in degree completion for students. Many stated that when students are attending

community college, they need to know why they are at the college and what they want to do. Without a goal in mind, most students drop out of college and halt their associate degree progress.

Participant 7, a humanities instructor who has been teaching at the college for 20 years, was asked what factors they thought inhibited student completion of an associate degree and they stated:

“I also think trying to see what motivates students so that way we can help them so that’s not a limitation is really important. If we can tap into those intrinsic motivators, then they can take strides in overcoming various hurdles and be more proactive in telling us what those are.”

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 23 years, discussed how students need to take courses early in their associate degree related to their major to maintain student interest, relevancy, and prevent student drop out.

“You know if you want to be a teacher, you gotta be in the classroom the very first semester or second, at least seeing, because a lot of our students are seeing, or are being told, ‘you would be a great nurse’ without knowing that they are not even good at Science you know? You need to get in there and see very early on because this generation especially needs to make a connection with what I want to be and where am I at now? But if you put them in Psychology, English, History and Humanities courses, they are going to drop out early because they don’t see how it connects with what they are going to be early on. We know that higher ed for adults um, andragogy, pedagogy, all that stuff, different than with kids. If I go in there and I am getting more American History and I

didn't like History when I was in high school I am more likely to drop out but if you put me in an IT class where, because that is my major, I can stomach all the other stuff because I am seeing the future. I don't think we are making them understand the big picture, and I don't mean anything negative about our generation, this new generation, but it's not a wait and see, they want instant gratification."

Participant 11, the Dean of one of the satellite campuses of the college who has been with the college for 12 years, identified goal setting of students as a factor that facilitates student degree completion of an associate degree by stating:

"I also think they have to have the internal motivation- is a big factor in completion as why the enrolled to begin with, what their end goals are. So I believe that is one of the bigger factors as well."

Participant 14, the Dean of students who has been in her position for five years, discussed the importance of students being able to identify their goals early while taking the student transfer success course:

"If they identify their career choice and their university choice within the first semester, then that really avoids all kinds of issues in terms of taking classes you don't need, starting in a major then deciding that it is not for you, you know so that is kind of the idea around that."

Lastly, participant 15, the Director of Counseling who has been with the counseling department at the college for 23 years, implied that goal setting of students improves student retention.

"Its important for completion because a lot of, in my opinion, a lot of times the reason people drop out is they don't have a clear idea why they are here and what they

are doing. They are not clear on their goal. They know they need to go to college. They need a job, and they want a job they like but then they are studying something they are not sure about and its hard and then they get discouraged so I get a lot of students coming to me like ‘I gotta figure this out. I’m not doing so well.’”

Maturity

Participant 10, a math instructor at the college, stated that maturity along with goal setting were crucial factors that facilitate and inhibit student degree completion of an associate degree.

“If they are immature and they don’t have any goals or both; immaturity and lack of goals because if they don’t know where they want to go, if they haven’t tapped into their passion than when it gets a little hard they are going to quit.”

They also noted the difference between high school students coming in and their maturity level at the academic level:

“I think one of the bigger challenges I have encountered, because we are more and more, our student population, our student population is younger, when I started here our average aged student was about 35. It’s about 25 now, so a part of that is all of the factories that closed and moved and all of those students have gone through the system, they may came back but for the most part they have found their niche and they are done. So we are really courting the high school graduates, more so than when I first came and um, those high school students come with a totally different mindset. So maybe, it has to occur at the high school level, some kind of change, some kind of, now we are trying

with our advisory committee to develop some relationships with these high school guidance counselors because they have a lack of perception about us”

When asked if there was anything else that they would like to add they stated that goal setting in students was important that they had seen in their career. They noted:

“Uh, hum, I think that if students are more, have more exposure to possibilities for-what is this education going to get for you to help them. If they have no goal, I think they should pursue, there should be something in place where students are so undecided on what they want, maybe the first year, within that first year, they should have determined at least a tentative goal, at least something that they have to do in order to pursue, see what they want to pursue, some exposure to different-what are the possibilities?

Participant 5, a current student who intends to graduate at the end of the semester, also implied that maturity was a factor that facilitated and inhibited student completion of an associate degree. They mentioned:

“I have noticed that a lot of the students that come straight from high school don’t really want to be here and that may contribute in my opinion to you know, people dropping out after a semester or not even completing their first semester. They are not really in it with their whole heart when they show up. It’s kind of like their parents said ‘You either go to college or get a job and get out. Well, I will go to Mountain.’”

Participant 13, the Director of Soar who has been in the position for 2 and ½ years, also emphasized that a student’s maturity at both the academic and emotional level was crucial to student completion of an associate degree at the college. They discussed that older students are normally more disciplined and emphasized:

“Maturity, we are seeing a lack of that quite a bit, especially with newer students coming in right out of high school. They are not ready to actually be in college.

Academically and emotionally, some are just not at the point in their lives they are ready for college. There is such a drastic change from high school to college and they are not prepared to handle it. We see a lot come in with the attitude where they think they can just be a warm body like they were in high school. They come to Mountain and think if they just show up they are going to pass. So it’s a drastic change for them when they actually have to do work to pass their classes.”

Participant 8, who has taught at the college for 23 years specializing in humanities courses also discussed maturity of students, specifically students immediately entering the college as recent high school graduates. They stated:

“That is a challenge from high school, because nobody fails, nobody, the grades are inflated. And so you know they are like, ‘I came to every class’ but you didn’t do the work. So, I say what is going to be the outcome if you do this? What are you going to commit too? What are you going to do differently because students don’t want to change? I will say, ‘were you this kind of student in high school?’ Not meaning anything detrimental, good or bad, and they say ‘yeah’ and I say ‘well how did that do? Did that work for you?’ and they say ‘not really’ well, ‘what are you going to do differently?’ Its hard to change but you are going to have to change, this is college, we are not in high school anymore and just pass you and. That is a real problem with student success. They are going to have to have a mind shift of control: I have to have the soft skills, I make the choices here, and there are consequences for choices and that goes beyond-that is beyond

making an A in math. That is knowing how to set a goal and keep it. That is how to be successful- I know how to study. They don't know how to study.”

Developmental Courses

Academic Course Success

An important theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of developmental courses for students to prepare them for future academic success specifically in regard to student completion of an associate degree. Multiple instructors, a student, and an administrator discussed the positive and negative aspects of developmental courses for students in their academic journey.

Participant 6, a mathematics instructor who has been teaching full-time at the college for 15 years, was asked if they had any recommendations for what the college can do to facilitate student completion of an associate degree and he discussed the importance of developmental courses. They responded:

“We need to realize that developmental courses are necessary and we need to put more resources towards that. The other thing that has happened the past several years in community colleges is that we have de-emphasized developmental education. We have put in these modules for mathematics, we have changed our placement test, to where very few students have to take developmental courses. We have this things called Multiple Measures that is used for placement and essentially what that does is if a student has met certain criteria, they don't even have to take the placement test. So as a result, the number of student taking developmental courses have gone way down.”

When asked what the result was of this change it was emphasized:

“They are having trouble when they are getting to their curriculum level courses. I see it when I teach. So they are having to take curriculum level courses multiple times.”

The concept of student morale emerged in the interview with the policy change of developmental courses. It was discussed how they felt that this policy change was to ensure that students would graduate in 2-3 years instead of having to take extra developmental courses and the degree program take longer. Also, referred to as the “credit-creep.” They noted:

“You throw a student in a course that they are not academically prepared for, its like throwing them in ice water and it just really cuts down on the success of the students. I can’t tell you how many students if they get into a class that is over their head they just freeze up. It’s hard for them, especially the ones who have been out of school for a long time. It was done, it was not an academic decision. I can tell you one of the things that they said, ok. If you have a student that comes in and they’ve got 2-3 semesters of developmental courses then that throws them instead of completing a program in two years, it makes it a three year program and if you tell them they have a three year program-They are going to be less likely [to complete their degree], and they say ok ,well let’s make sure they can finish in two years but if you’re throwing them into classes they are ill-prepared for it defeats the purpose.”

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 23 years, also discussed how the state policy change in regard to developmental courses was inhibiting student success of completing an associate degree. They emphasized:

“Mountain is cutting back on developmental courses, it’s not needed anymore, the state of North Carolina believes if you graduate from high school with a GPA of just a

2.6 you don't need any developmental courses. That's probably where I think we are going to fail them. I mean, if you said what are the risks, what keeps them from passing, we are putting them into classes now that they are not prepared for."

Participant 9, a humanities instructor who has been teaching for 13 years, highlighted the frustrations of students being in courses that they are not academically prepared for as a result of the policy change of developmental courses. They noted:

"It is really frustrating that really what seems to get in their way the most is out of our hands, but one thing that would be nice and better is sometimes we get students that are not as really prepared as they could be. We are seeing more of that now since we are- there have been some statewide changes that have not required students to take placement testing and losing some of that developmental, that is hard and sometimes students do get frustrated because they go into classes that they may not be adequately prepared for so that is always frustrating but it is frustrating when the things that are keeping them from finishing school are not things that we can fix but certainly those do not inhibit everybody..."

However, participant 3, an Associate of Arts student, discussed how they have seen developmental courses lead to fellow peers becoming frustrated and end up transferring to another college. They stated:

"Those count as credits even though they don't on the program evaluation. I had a friend who started around the same time as me, she went here for a good while, she took full semesters, but she had to take the remedial math classes and they showed up and she thought that she was uh, finish, but those classes counted. See I placed out of all the remedial stuff but I chose to take the English writing classes to make my skills better

because in high school my teachers really didn't help me much. I don't know if it was my teachers or just me, but I found a loophole to graduate on time, which that should probably be fixed to with the public system, but um, like she got those classes on there and she thought she was graduating and turns out she had to take like twelve more credits and she was like 'I'm done, I am just going to go over to UNCA, so she didn't finish her degree here. I tried to explain it to her but she was just fed up.'

Participant 3 suggested that it would be nice if the college could count developmental courses as like a separate degree or certification for students who need developmental courses.

Lastly, participant 12, the Vice-President of Academics and Student Services who has been in the role for one year at the college, emphasized the role of "unintended barriers" that inhibit student completion of an associate degree. They noted:

"I think sometimes we put unintended barriers in front of students, like putting too many prerequisites in front of a course. You know, it used to be that students who were unprepared would spend a lot of time in developmental studies and not ever get out of developmental studies and so they get frustrated and drop out for that so going back to your course sequencing and making sure that you have the proper alignment along with the proper skill sets to be successful, you know, is crucial because sometimes I think that you can put barriers on students that are unintended."

External Factors

Multiple external factors in a student's life while working towards their associate degree facilitates and inhibits associate degree completion at the college. This theme was

discussed among various instructors, students, and administrators. The external factors that were identified from the interviews with participants were: personal, attendance, financial, transportation, and childcare.

Personal

Participant 6, a mathematics instructor employed at the college for 15 years, discussed the psychological and emotional barriers that students face within community colleges. They also discussed that students must have emotional support outside of the college to facilitate student completion of an associate degree.

“Again if you come from a background where you’ve had the parental support where the parents go to the PTA meetings, they have had this expectation-”

“More proactive?”

“More proactive and the student has had that kind of emotional support, network, encouragement, getting them to think, not only should be in college, but they can be and are supposed to be in college, you know that is one thing, but if you have someone whose never, parents have never encouraged them to go to school, never have went to a PTA meeting, or have not had time, I am not being judgmental with this, its, a lot of times they don’t have the whole mindset of this is someplace where I belong, and so when you tell a student, you know, come by my office, they view that as intimidating.”

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 23 years, discussed the multiple personal obstacles that students face while working towards their associate degree:

“Until we address the fact that people who are poor don’t think like we do, we just don’t understand that, we think, pull yourself up by your boot straps and get on with your life, when you are worried about being a single mother and feeding your kid and daycare, until we address outside factors that are keeping them from being there and we are not and transportation, and in the heck are we going to get them there, they don’t even have cars. You know, so it all comes back to the wholeness of the student. A student doesn’t just come to you knowing how to do math, they come with issues that everybody on that campus has to agree to address. When a student comes in my office and says ‘I am going to have to drop out because I don’t have transportation,’ I need to know what resources to point them in and we have got to solve that problem because that is our customers. I don’t want education to be a financial/customer/business, but on the other hand, that is who we are serving and until we serve that whole individual, we are not going to keep them.”

Participant 9, a humanities instructor who has been an instructor for 13 years, discussed how everyday life becomes an obstacle for students in regard to student completion of an associate degree. When asked what they have seen inhibiting student degree completion they responded:

“Strangely enough it is hardly anything that deals with the school. If their lives would just be, -if the dog wouldn’t get sick, or their kid wouldn’t get strep throat, um, if the job didn’t fall through, or the parents didn’t have health problems, um, really it seems to be those are-and that’s what is frustrating for instructors because we can’t fix that. I can’t go and make your ex-husband stop being a creep and bothering you all of the time about custodial issues. I can’t do that. But we try as much as possible to, that is one of the

reasons why being able to do creative scheduling and different kinds of things to help students, that is as much as we can do on that end so it is really frustrating that really what seems to get in their way the most is out of our hands...”

Participant 13, the SOAR Director at the college, highlighted on personal factors that inhibit student completion of an associate degree:

“A lot of times it is personal factors that get in the way, like family, jobs, things that are out of the students control, and just life in general. We deal with this quite a bit with our SOAR students. The one thing we do that helps with our students is, we try to be in constant contact with them through email, phone calls, or just waiting outside of the classroom to catch them when class is over, or catch them before class, just to say ‘come by and see me,’ it helps to keep that connection. Staying in contact with students’ college wide would make an impact on more students completing their degree. However, this can be difficult given the limited number of faculty and staff at the college.”

Participant 12, the Vice President of Academics and Student Services who has been at the college for a year, emphasized personal barriers that students face while attending community college and working towards associate degree completion. It was emphasized:

“I think probably the largest impact is their personal situation. There is not a lot things, not a lot we are going to be able to do to help fix a personal situation other than trying to support them and get them to resources that could help them. Most people that drops out is more so because of personal-they take on too much, too many classes, and at the end of the day, the college is going to get dropped over the personal stuff. It just is.”

Participant 14, who has been the Dean of Students at the college for five years, discussed how personal barriers and mental illness inhibits student completion of an associate degree at the college. They noted:

“Something we have seen increasing over the past ten years in the community college setting is mental illness. Students dealing with personal issues and mental illness. Our students dealing with um, depression, anxiety, things of that nature, and that becoming issues to the point where they might have to step out and come back the next semesters but having to take some time off.”

Attendance

Participant 10, who has taught mathematics at the college for 21 years, discussed how attendance of students is also an issue facilitating or inhibiting a student’s completion of an associate degree. They discussed how instructors are trying to promote better attendance among students by stating:

“So we have been putting our heads together and this semester we started emphasizing one soft skill and so we were emphasizing attendance and timeliness, being in class on time and being in class period. So that’s, we are trying that so we are all on the same page within our division. So we are going ten minutes into class, we are supposed to lock the door anyway because of safety issues, so we are just telling them that we are going to close and lock the door ten minutes after class starts. If you are late, you are late, you are going to have to beat on the door and hopefully you are embarrassed by doing that but some of these people I am not so sure.”

When asked if tardiness prompted this recent decision they noted:

“We have it every semester, attendance is a huge issue. They are trying different things with scheduling. These hybrid classes, online classes, late start classes, mini-mesters, things like that to try and give students some different scheduling options. But again, we are small and it limits traditional options when you take out a section and make it non-traditional and you only have section of that course, then its hard. We are not really big enough to do a lot of that, and you know, and really see like evidence side by side are they succeeding better in the traditional class? Which one? We don’t have that because we are not big enough.”

Financial

Participant 14, who has been the Dean of Students at the college for five years, discussed how financial barriers often inhibit student completion of an associate degree at the college. They noted:

“I would say, our biggest barrier for our students is financial of course. Students just simply cannot afford to continue.

Participant 8, a humanities instructor who has taught at the college for 23 years, discussed the extreme poverty and the socio-economic problems that many students face at the college within the rural geographic location of the college that can inhibit student completion of an associate degree. They stated:

“A student who lives in extreme poverty, doesn’t have well educated parents, who does not feel like school is important, education is not as an important role here, we live in an area where its almost ‘uppity’ to be educated, you are getting out of your ah-you know, so that really hurts their chances of being a success, um, there, I think when you

are-I am older and the older I get the more I am convinced that poverty is the culprit for most things. I am sorry, you don't have good nutrition, you don't have a good house, you don't have adequate-if your basic needs are not met-

“Maslows [hierarchy of needs]...”

“Yes, Maslows, it's a hierarch, it's almost impossible to care too much about education, you know?”

Participant 12, the Vice President of Academics and Student Services who has been at the college for a year, discussed the financial barriers that students face while attending community college and working towards associate degree completion. They emphasized:

“Cost, I think has an impact, especially if they don't necessarily qualify for full Pell or they don't get a scholarship or something like that in nature, costs of textbooks is outrageous and tuition, you know, is increasing so the cost can have a major barrier so trying to minimize costs, one thing we have been doing here at Mountain since I have gotten here is just trying to relook at our textbooks and do away with expensive textbooks and get something that is more cost effective or not even use a textbook, try to use free resources and stuff like that so I think all of those have an impact on students trying to complete.”

Transportation

Participant 5, a full-time student who will be graduating with an associate degree in the spring of 2017, discussed how both financial and transportation issues were their biggest challenges that they had faced while being a student.

“The biggest challenge that comes to my mind is this time of year is commuting, especially since I have a child and my fiancé has two kids. With the weather being the way it is, we only have one vehicle that is four wheel drive and he works night shift at the prison. So basically, he comes home with the vehicle, I get in the vehicle and go, and then hopefully I can make it home before he is supposed to leave so that is the biggest major challenge. Other challenges, at the very beginning, of every semester, we had some financial issues that arise just because you are kind of waiting for that refund to come in and I work part-time here at the school as a tutor but they are always running a month behind and you know, it’s just for some reason, this specific time of the year, at the beginning is hard on everybody.”

Childcare

Participant 11, a Dean on campus at the college who has been with the college for 12 years, emphasized how external factors facilitated or inhibited student completion of an associate degree. They provided the example of childcare:

“I really do think that a lot of times why people don’t complete is something completely external. Its, you know again child care, family illness, or just not being able to afford. “I have a student coming in, that girl that is probably waiting now, um, she is new to online classes. She is having to take online classes a lot because she has got two kids but her computer is giving her issues so I think she is already feeling frustrated with the online class. So it’s just little things that sometimes prevent people from following through.”

Participant 14, who has been the Dean of Students at the college for five years, discussed how childcare inhibits student completion of an associate degree at the college.

They noted:

“Childcare is a big issue, dependable childcare, and a lot of times that goes back to the financial too and being able to afford dependable childcare.”

Summary

Qualitative analysis of the data revealed eight prominent themes that emerged from the interviews with each participant associated with the college in regard to factors that facilitate and inhibit student completion of an associate degree. Curriculum alignment was of crucial importance in facilitating associate degree completion. Proper advising was critical in making sure students are in the proper degree program. Support services at the college were seen as a vital tool to facilitate student completion of an associate degree. Relationships with instructors, administrators, and students at the college were emphasized to facilitate associate degree completion. Interestingly, the employment status of instructors, specifically adjunct instructors at the college, was viewed by some as a factor that inhibits student degree completion of an associate degree. Instructors emphasized the importance of a students' intrinsic motivation and their goals as important factors in facilitating student degree completion of an associate degree. The topic of developmental courses was seen as both a factor facilitating student degree completion while enrolled in academic courses. However, other participants felt that developmental courses could often become an un-intentional barrier to associate degree completion for students. Multiple external factors were also identified by instructors,

students, and administrators that inhibit student degree completion of an associate degree at the college. Further research findings are analyzed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Community colleges throughout the nation have grown to be of significant importance during the period of 2006 and 2016. Due to the economic recession that began in 2008, community colleges re-emphasized workforce development (Hultin, 2016). The importance of community colleges has also grown in part due to the strengthening of communities and the embracing of local cultures. Recently, the topic of community colleges made the news in the 2015 State of the Union Address with a presidential proposal to make community college education free to students who maintain specific requirements (Remarks, 2015). Some states, including North Carolina, are providing ways for high school students to take community college courses free of charge and earn college credit before they graduate (Rural, 2014). The North Carolina educational grant, Investing in Rural Innovative Schools (IRIS), has put more emphasis on rural high school students being able to obtain college credit during normal school hours while on the campus of their high school in the hopes of increasing student success at the collegiate level (Rural, 2014).

Community colleges have faced scrutiny when compared to other post-secondary educational institutions in terms of academic rigor, retention and degree completion. “The open access and affordability community colleges offer traditionally have appealed to student populations who have been characterized as low-income, first-generation, minority or working adults (Hultin, 2016). Policy makers have questioned institutional commitment as a factor that contributes to student success in terms of degree completion

(Voight & Hundrieser, 2008). As noted by Voight and Hundreiser, “measures of the quality of an institution’s overall product, retention and graduation rates are of interest not only to accrediting agencies, policy makers, and the general public or taxpayers, but, especially to students, their families, and contributing alumni” (2008, p. 2). Themes in relation to retention should be analyzed to investigate degree completion at the level of an associate degree.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and the faculty of one community college on factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion. This qualitative study was a case study as it focused on one institution of higher education and was conducted by interviewing 15 participants associated with the community college.

The participants were selected through sampling consisting of both snowball and sampling specifically related to the research study focus. For the purpose of the research study, degree completion was defined as graduating with an associate degree.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and faculty of one community college on the factors that facilitate or inhibit collegiate student success toward associate degree completion. Attention was paid to community colleges, students, administrators, support services, and faculty. It was important to identify factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion to assist decision makers at the community college.

Research Questions and Findings

The following overarching research questions were used to examine the factors that facilitate or inhibit associate degree completion at the community college level:

Research Question # 1

- 1) What support systems or resources are in place at the community college to assist students with degree completion?

Six themes developed from the interviews in regard to the vast support systems and resources provided by the college. From the interviews, support systems or resources were identified provided by the college for students to utilize. The themes that emerged from the interviews in relation to support services were advising, support services, relationships, faculty status, developmental courses, and external factors.

Advising

Responses to interviews for this case study revealed the importance of academic advising in regard to facilitating or inhibiting student degree completion of an associate degree. Nine out of the fifteen participants mentioned advising in their interview.

Proper advising is critical to degree completion and ensuring proper placement of students aligned with their goals in the correct degree pathway to transfer to a university or for job placement. Three administrators that were participants in the study emphasized the importance of advising and degree completion. If a student is placed in the wrong courses or degree pathway early, this discourages students from graduating due to them

having to back track and take more courses leading to a longer amount of time to graduate.

As Law (2015) discussed, when a college implements advising strategies that are career path oriented, students are more successful in regard to continuing to the next semester at a higher rate. Proper advising prevents credit creep for students and a shorter amount of time dedicated to graduate.

Support Services

Proper support services for the student population provided by the college was another theme that emerged in relation to student degree completion. All 15 interview participants identified not just one, but multiple support services that the college provided with details discussing what each service provided for the student population. The support services at the college identified by all participants included the SOAR program that is a federal funded program, the academic success center, advising, the early alert system, and the counseling center. Instructors serve as academic advisors and are also responsible for making notifications for the early alert system. Many academic instructors at the college also utilize office hours to provide tutoring support for students in the academic success center.

The findings of this study support the findings of the study conducted by the *Community College Review*. As noted by Chen (n.d.), multiple factors were identified that influence student success, specifically college support services. David and Fike, authors of the study, found that multiple support services influenced a student's likelihood of return including collegiate advising in regard to number of hours taken in a

semester, number of hours dropped in the first fall semester, a student's ability to receive financial aid, and participation in student services. Ascend Learning (2012) also identified multiple characteristics of college programs contributing to attrition. The research study interviews support the claim that "it is the characteristics of an institution or program such as its resources, faculties, structural/organizational arrangements, and its members, that can limit or facilitate the development and integration of individuals within the institution or program" (p. 4).

Relationships

Administrators, instructors, students, and graduates discussed the importance of relationships in relation to student completion of an associate degree. Eight of the participants discussed the importance of relationships at the college and how the college was at an advantage due to its size. The study revealed that the smaller college atmosphere is an advantage when building relationships even though the smaller college was at a disadvantage in regard to course offerings and options. This atmosphere was also an advantage among other departments. One respondent noted that larger colleges often do not partner well with other departments and that employees of the college are able to spend more time with students and focus on their needs which helps with student retention.

Faculty Status

Multiple participants of the study discussed the impact of the college transitioning from full-time instructors to increasing the number of adjunct instructors. The research

study exposed how this can influence student degree completion at the college in regard to forming stronger relationships with students and also a stronger knowledge base in relation to content and educational instruction.

One instructor noted how this transition makes it harder for students to drop in and visit with instructors and have face-to-face conversations. Another instructor noted how instructors needed an educational background along with a discipline knowledge base to best meet the developmental and educational needs of students. Two students also discussed the change and increasing number of full-time faculty retiring while enrolled at the college.

This theme supports research findings “consistent with the notion that a more professional atmosphere and personalized services, such as having a greater proportion of full-time faculty rather than part-time and expanding academic support services, seem to benefit the traditional-age student population” (Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2008, p. 644).

Two research participants noted the socio-economic barriers that students face due to the setting of the college being in a high poverty region. Mamiseishvili and Deggs (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to examine persistence outcomes over a 3-year period of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds across the nation at public 2-year institutions. The results of the study showed that 40% of students “did not realize their goals and left college without returning” (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013, p. 425). The findings also indicated that “low-income students generally take longer than 3 years to complete a degree” (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013, p. 425). Their research study

supports the findings in this study revealing lower-income and lack of goals for a student inhibits associate degree completion.

Developmental Courses

The issue of developmental courses was mentioned by participants. Six participants discussed developmental courses even though they were not asked specifically about the concept of developmental courses. Three instructors noted how the reduction of developmental courses was negatively influencing student performance in academic courses and this leads to students becoming discouraged. One student and an administrator also noted how the credit creep discouraged students by creating an unintended barrier toward degree completion.

This assertion is supported by Hein, Smerdon, and Sambolt, (2013) who examined literature and provided a research brief of information for state, school and district personnel “seeking support to determine whether their students are on a path to postsecondary success” (p. 1). Early childhood through early postsecondary education research was summarized by the researchers to identify student skills, behaviors, and other characteristics that predict future academic and workplace success. Their research found that “college students enrolled in four-year institutions who take remedial courses are more likely to drop out of college or transfer to a two-year institution” (p. 10).

Rath, Rock, and Laferriere (2013) identified multiple reasons why community college students leave school while also detailing practices and strategies that need to be implemented to increase retention graduation rates. Multiple issues were noted to lead students to dropping of school. Inadequate academic preparation was found to be a

contributor. “Many students arrive at college without the academic foundation necessary to excel. This sets students up for failure and often causes them to waste time and money on remedial education” (Rath, Rockm & Laferriere, 2013, p. 3). Remedial education can either lead a student to success or hinder a student’s progress. “Almost 50% of 2-year community college students are required to take expensive and time consuming remedial courses that do not provide college credit, but increase a student’s chances of dropping out. Approximately \$3 billion is spent each year on remedial education” (Rath, Rockm & Laferriere, 2013, p. 3).

External Factors

Multiple external factors were identified by all fifteen research participants facilitating or inhibiting student completion of an associate degree. Two instructors, five administrators, and one student stated how personal issues in life outside of their educational setting is linked to a student’s academic success in a course which then leads to degree success.

Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim and Wilcox (2013) noted external factors, including psychosocial variables were relevant to the outcomes measures of success. “Academic self-efficacy and organization and attention to study were predictive of first-semester GPA when controlling relevant demographic factors” (p. 260). Psychosocial variables that were predictive of college students’ life satisfaction were: stress/time management, involvement in college activities, and emotional satisfaction with academics.

One instructor and one administrator noted the socio-economic connection with degree completion. The college within the case study is located in a high-poverty region which impacted student degree completion at the college. Mamiseishvili and Deggs (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to examine persistence outcomes over a 3-year period of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds across the nation at public 2-year institutions. The results of the study showed that 40% of students “did not realize their goals and left college without returning” (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013, p. 425). The findings also indicated that “low-income students generally take longer than 3 years to complete a degree” (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013, p. 425). Their research study supports the findings revealed in this study in that both clear goals set by students along with the socio-economic status of a student can facilitate student completion of an associate degree.

The research study revealed six themes from the interviews in regard to support systems and resources provided by the college that facilitate student completion of an associate degree. Support systems and resources provided by the college were clearly identified by participants. The themes that emerged from the interviews in relation to support services were advising, support services, relationships, faculty status, and developmental courses.

Research Question # 2

- 2) What factors in the college student success course at this community college facilitate or inhibit successful degree completion?

Two themes emerged from the interviews in regard to the college student success course at the institution in regard to facilitating or inhibiting successful associate degree completion. These themes were curriculum and intrinsic motivation.

Curriculum

Curriculum was revealed to be important to the student success course at the college and for the entire associate degree program. This course is also known as the college transfer success course. The older curriculum followed the *On Course* curriculum that explored the seven habits of successful students. The most recent college transfer success course curriculum was changed to what the university system of North Carolina preferred. One instructor stated the current curriculum compared to the *On Course* material was not beneficial to the needs of students because it lacked instruction on study habits, soft skills, study skills, and personal responsibility of students. One administrator and one instructor who have taught the course also noted that the length of course (16 weeks) is too long for a one hour credit course. Another student noted that the course required too much work for a 1 credit hour course.

The second area of concern in regard to the college transfer success course was the duration of the course and the lack of curriculum alignment. One administrator noted how the overall length of any course is influential in degree completion and suggested 10 week courses instead of 16 week courses so that students can finish earlier. Curriculum characteristics were discussed in the literature in association with attrition.

Ascend Learning (2012) identified multiple characteristics of students and college programs contributing to attrition. Program characteristics were identified as a

contributor to attrition; “it is the characteristics of an institution or program such as its resources, faculties, structural/organizational arrangements, and its members, that can limit or facilitate the development and integration of individuals within the institution or program” (p. 4). Rath, Rock, and Laferriere (2013) identified multiple reasons why community college students leave school while also detailing practices and strategies that need to be implemented to increase retention graduation rates. The researchers found that curriculum alignment contributes to increasing student retention and degree completion. Curriculum alignment was one important factor contributing to student success.

Many of the research participants noted that the college is taking steps to change the college transfer success course by making it a hybrid course organized into modules that instruct students on soft skills along with college transfer information to better prepare students for degree completion (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). The new adjusted and updated course will begin in the fall of 2017 and is currently being piloted.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation of students was also found to be of significant importance in the college student success course at the institution in regard to facilitating or inhibiting successful associate degree completion. Three instructors noted that the course is a successful course if students are open to the material that is being taught. However, it depends on the maturity of students and what their motivation and ultimate goal is once a student graduates.

Cho and Karp (2013) researched whether “student success course enrollment, as well as student and institutional characteristics, has positive associations with shorter-term student outcomes, including earning any college credits within the first year and persistence into the second year” (p. 86). The findings indicated that there “are clear positive associations between enrollment in a student success course in the first semester and the short-term outcomes of credit attainment and second-year persistence” (p. 101). Based on this research study, college success courses have a positive connection with student success at the community college level in regard to degree completion, however participants in the research study noted how important advising is and that it is imperative for student transfer success courses to be taken within the first semester of a student’s degree associate degree.

Conclusions

Through research in this qualitative research case study, based on the experiences of fifteen individuals associated with the college who agreed to participate in the study, conclusions and recommendations were developed to facilitate student completion of an associate degree at the college. Emergent themes from the interviews were: curriculum, advising, relationships, and developmental courses. These themes were mentioned within the literature review, however, not as extensively discussed as they were in the interviews. It is important to understand the many factors inhibiting and facilitating student degree completion to improve retention and to also ensure the success of students obtaining an associate degree.

Recommendations for Practice

The data that were collected through interviews and analyzed in this study support the following recommendations:

1. Curriculum alignment and course offerings are important in facilitating associate degree completion so that students have more course options, multiple course sections, and flexibility to ensure 2 year degree completion.
2. Proper advising and degree program alignment is important to facilitating degree completion. Students should be enrolled in courses based on their career goals to ensure that students are in the proper degree program within the first semester to ensure associate degree completion within two years.
3. Support services available to students at the college should be maintained, promoted, and improved so that students have academic and personal support systems to ensure retention.
4. Relationships among instructors and students should be emphasized for fostering associate degree completion.
5. Full-time instructors are needed to ensure a supportive academic environment to facilitate student completion of an associate degree.
6. Intrinsic motivators of students are important to identify within the first semester of enrollment so that students identify their career goals within two academic semesters of an associate degree.
7. Developmental courses are important in ensuring that students are academically prepared to participate in academic content courses for degree completion.

Recommendations for Further Research

The research study and the findings have demonstrated the importance of further research in identifying factors that facilitate and inhibit associate degree completion at the community college within the case study.

1. Conduct a future qualitative comparative case study by interviewing part-time students and full-time students to identify any differences in responses.
2. Conduct a future qualitative case study at a community college geographically located in an urban community and compare the differences.
3. Conduct a future qualitative case study that investigates the new college transfer success course beginning in the fall of 2017 and its role in facilitating or inhibiting student completion of an associate degree.
4. Conduct a future quantitative research study exploring the rates of associate degree completion between dual-enrollment and traditional students.

Summary

Chapter 5 introduced the qualitative case study, the statement of the problem, restated the research questions along with the research findings, discussed conclusions and recommendations from the research findings, and lastly, included recommendations for future research in regard to factors that facilitate and inhibit associate degree completion.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Introduction

A. Welcome.

B. I would like to thank you for your participation in this study about your perceptions of Factors that Facilitate or Inhibit Associate Degree Completion at the Community College Level. I will be conducting a case study on this college so all of your information, feelings and thoughts are important. Your participation in this study will remain anonymous. This session should take approximately one-hour. Do you have any questions before I begin taping this conversation?

C. I will have each interviewee review the consent form.

D. Conduct the interview session.

II. Interview Questions (Administrators/Faculty)

- 1) What is your role at the community college?
- 2) In your role at this community college, what factors facilitate student completion of an associate degree?
- 3) In your role at this community college, what factors inhibit student completion of an associate degree?
- 4) What support services does this college provide to assist students in the completion of the associate degree?
- 5) How does the student success course facilitate or inhibit student completion of the associate degree?
- 6) Do you have recommendations for what this college can do to facilitate student completion of the associate degree?
- 7) Is there anything else that you would like to add?

III. Interview Questions (Students/graduates)

- 1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself as a student?
- 2) What challenges have you faced while working toward associate degree at the community college?
- 3) Have you found resources have you found to be helpful as you work towards your degree? Explain
- 4) Do you have recommendations for what this college can do to facilitate student completion of the associate degree?
- 5) Explain how the college student success course has facilitated or inhibited completion of an associate degree? Explain
- 6) Is there anything else that you would like to add?

IV. Conclusion

- A. This is what I understand that you believe to be the most important aspects of our Interview today.....Do you agree?
- B. Any additional comments?
- C. Turn-off the tape recorder.
- D. Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator's Contact Information: Cathryn Hughes

Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

INFORMED CONSENT

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to voluntarily participate.

A. Purpose: The purpose of this research study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of students, administrators, and the faculty of one community college on factors that facilitate or inhibit Associate degree completion. The intent of this study is to identify factors that facilitate or inhibit collegiate student success in terms of Associate degree completion to increase the number of graduates at community colleges. For the purpose of the research study, degree completion is defined as graduating with an Associate's degree.

B. Duration:

This study will include one visit with each participant to interview each participant for about one hour each. Fifteen participants will participate in the study. Due to the study being a qualitative case study, all participants for the study are required to be employed by, enrolled in, or graduated from the same community college being investigated in North Carolina. This study includes 10 community college professionals total and 5 student participants. 5 participants of the study are administrators employed by a single institution. 5 participants are academic instructors employed by the same institution. 3 student participants are current students at the community college. 2 are former students

of the community college who graduated with an Associate's degree. The study will be conducted in a single community college in North Carolina.

- C. Procedures: The procedures, which as a participant in this research will involve you, include:

As a participant of the case study, you will participate in a non-invasive interview. The interview will be recorded and then later transcribed.

- D. Alternative Procedures/Treatments: The alternative procedures/treatments available to you if you elect not to participate in this research study are

There are no alternative procedures/treatments available to you if you elect not to participate in the study.

- E. Possible Risks/Discomforts: The possible risks and/or discomforts from your participation in this research study include:

There is a potential loss of confidentiality due to the interviews being interviewed and transcribed.

- F. Possible Benefits: The possible benefits of your participation in this research study are:

A benefit of participating in this study will allow participants to gain insights into their role at the community college being studied to make future adjustments and improvements.

- G. Compensation in the Form of Payments to Participant:

No compensation in the form of payments is being provided to participate in the study.

- H. Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research experiment is voluntary. *You may choose not to participate.* If you decide to participate in this research study, you can change your mind and quit at any time. If you choose not to participate, or change your mind and quit, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling Cathryn Hughes at _____. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about continuing to participate.

- I. Contact for Questions: If you have any questions, problems, or research-related

problems at any time, you may call Cathryn Hughes at (828)-284-6268. You may also call the Chairperson of the ETSU Institutional Review Board at 423.439.6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423.439.6055 or 423.439.6002.

- J. Confidentiality: Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored at the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board for at least 6 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, Cathryn Hughes and her research team have access to the study records. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as described in this form.
-

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understand this Informed Consent Document and that I had the opportunity to have them explained to me verbally. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that all my questions have been answered. By signing below, I confirm that I freely and voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

APPENDIX C

INITIAL EMAIL

December 20, 2016

To: Instructors and Administrators at the Community College

From: Cathryn Hughes

Date: December 20, 2016

Re: Research Interviews

Hi _____,

I am currently working on my Doctorate in Educational Leadership and I was wondering if you would be willing to let me interview you as participant of my research study? I plan on conducting a case study of a community college to investigate the factors contributing to student success at the community college level. I would like to gain some perspectives from the faculty for my qualitative study.

Thanks so much for your time. If you can't I completely understand!

December 20, 2016

To: Students and former graduates of the Community College

From: Cathryn Hughes

Date: December 20, 2016

Re: Research Interview

Hi _____,

I am currently working on my Doctorate in Educational Leadership and plan to begin working on my dissertation this coming Fall and next Spring. Hoping to graduate next Spring 2017.

I was wondering if you would be willing to let me interview you as participant of my research study? I plan on conducting a case study of a community college to investigate the factors contributing to student success at the community college level. I would like to gain some perspectives from the student population for my qualitative study.

Thanks so much for your time. If you can't I completely understand!

Cathryn Hughes

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF PERMISSION

December 2, 2016

Ms. Cathryn Hughes,

This letter is to grant you permission to conduct a study interviewing select faculty, staff, and students at _____ Community College that will be used to complete your dissertation. If you need further assistance or have any questions please contact me by email at _____ or by phone at _____.

Sincerely,

President

VITA

CATHRYN JEAN-CLAIR HUGHES

Personal Data: Date of Birth: February 9, 1988
Place of Birth: Asheville, NC

Education: Educational Leadership, Ed. D.
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee
2017

Masters in Library Science
Appalachian State University
K-12 Media Coordinator
Boone, NC
2013

Bachelor of Arts in Education
Mars Hill University
Certifications in: 6-12 Social Studies, 6-9 English/Language Arts,
K-12 ESL
Mars Hill, NC
2010

Associate in Arts
Mayland Community College
Spruce Pine, NC
2008

Graduate
Mountain Heritage High School,
Burnsville, NC
2006

Professional
Experience: 2015-Present- English as a Second Language, Grades: 6-12
2011-2015-Social Studies Educator, Grades: 9-12
Yancey County Schools
Burnsville, NC

2015-Present- Humanities Instructor
2015-Present-American Government
2015-2017-United States History
Murray State College,

Tishomingo, OK

2014-Present- Instructor
Yancey County Family Violence Coalition
Burnsville, NC 28714

2011-2014- Human Resource Development Instructor
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2006-2016- Radio Announcer
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